



THE PERCY REPRINTS

No. 3

ESSAYS ON  
POETRY



PEACOCK  
SHELLEY: BROWNING

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PEACOCK'S FOUR AGES OF POETRY  
SHELLEY'S DEFENCE OF POETRY  
BROWNING'S ESSAY ON SHELLEY





PEACOCK'S FOUR AGES  
OF POETRY  
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POETRY  
BROWNING'S ESSAY ON  
SHELLEY

EDITED BY H. F. B. BRETT-SMITH



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## INTRODUCTION

EXACTLY a century has passed since *The Four Ages of Poetry* first appeared in print, and no student of Shelley in this country has hitherto thought it worth while to unite, in one small volume, Peacock's essay and its answer.\* Yet Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* was a direct and detailed reply to his friend's attack, and if we allow the *Defence* to rank with the great pronouncements on poetry of such critics as Sir Philip Sidney, Dryden, Matthew Arnold and Wordsworth, this neglect of its immediate source is remarkable.

Thomas Love Peacock, born in 1785, was close on seven years older than Shelley, whom he first met towards the end of 1812. Before Shelley's final departure from England in 1818 they had become intimate enough to read classical authors together and to join in a river expedition up the Thames. Peacock had also accepted an allowance from Shelley for some years, and had criticized his poems. A friendship which survives four such tests may fairly be called lasting, and it was not long disturbed even by Peacock's open disapproval of the desertion of Harriet Shelley. A cordial correspondence was kept up

\* Such a combined volume was indeed proposed by the Shelley Society for 1887, but without result. Thirty years ago *The Four Ages* was added, in small type, as an appendix to an American edition of Shelley's *Defence*, but there is no word about it, or about Peacock and his influence, to be found in a nineteen-page introduction by the editor, Professor A. S. Cook.

later between England and Italy, and upon Peacock fell the task of announcing his friend's death to Sir Timothy Shelley, and of negotiating with him for the maintenance of the widow and heir.

The dry and scholarly humour of his novels, and the perfection of his light or pathetic verse, have won Peacock such a niche in the history of our literature that it would be an impertinence to expatiate here upon his merits as an author. *The Four Ages of Poetry* has been declared by a good critic to be 'not a favourable specimen of Peacock's writing,'\* a compliment to his other work which is indeed high. The essay has at any rate one great merit, it stimulates thought, and as a piece of literary paradox for the magazine press it leaves very little to be desired. Early in 1819 Peacock had obtained an appointment at the India House, with duties which were well paid and not particularly onerous, and for some years he found plenty of time for literary work. A new periodical was being floated by Charles and James Ollier, the publishers who had printed Shelley's *Laon and Cythna*; and *The Four Ages of Poetry* appeared in the first number of Ollier's *Literary Miscellany* in 1820.

It may be granted at once that most of the importance of the article lies in the answer which it drew from Shelley. Peacock is being deliberately provocative and satirical throughout his essay. He divides the achievement of poetry into four ages, an original iron age of the celebration of tribal heroes, followed by a Homeric golden age of perfection, and a silver age of verse, either imitative or unheroic; the age of Virgil, Menander, Aristophanes, Horace, and Juvenal. Finally we reach the second childhood of poetry in the age of brass, which attempts to recapture the age of gold by returning to primitive barbarism and rejecting the polish and learning of the silver age. His classical example of this phase is the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus. So far

\* *Shelley's View of Poetry*, by A. C. Bradley.

there is little to quarrel with in the main theme,\* nor will many object to the choice of Shakespeare for an example of our own golden age, and of Dryden and Pope for our age of silver. But the sting is in the tail; the whole essay has but prepared the way for an attack on contemporary English poetry as representing an age of brass. 'While the historian and the philosopher are advancing in, and accelerating, the progress of knowledge, the poet is wallowing in the rubbish of departed ignorance, and raking up the ashes of dead savages to find gewgaws and rattles for the grown babies of the age. Mr. Scott digs up the poachers and cattle-stealers of the ancient border. Lord Byron cruizes for thieves and pirates on the shores of the Morea and among the Greek Islands. Mr. Southey wades through ponderous volumes of travels and old chronicles, from which he carefully selects all that is false, useless, and absurd, as being essentially poetical; and when he has a commonplace book full of monstrosities, strings them into an epic. Mr. Wordsworth picks up village legends from old women and sextons; and Mr. Coleridge, to the valuable information acquired from similar sources, superadds the dreams of crazy theologians and the mysticisms of German metaphysics, and favours the world with visions in verse, in which the quadruple elements of sexton, old woman, Jeremy Taylor, and Emanuel Kant are harmonized into a delicious poetical compound.'

By this time the critic has warmed to his work, and he concludes by vigorously asserting that a poet in modern times is a semi-barbarian in a civilized community, and that poetry, if cultivated, is cultivated to the neglect of some branch of useful study, 'as if it were still what it was in the Homeric age, the all-in-all of intellectual progression,

\* An interesting comparison with Peacock's view is afforded by the well-known paragraphs (the tenth to the eighteenth) of Macaulay's essay on Milton, beginning 'We think that as civilization advances poetry almost necessarily declines.'

and as if there were no such things in existence as mathematicians, astronomers, chemists, moralists, metaphysicians, historians, politicians, and political economists, who have built into the upper air of intelligence a pyramid, from the summit of which they see the modern Parnassus far beneath them, and, knowing how small a place it occupies in the comprehensiveness of their prospect, smile at the little ambition and the circumscribed perceptions with which the drivellers and mountebanks upon it are contending for the poetical palm and the critical chair.'

The whole article is written in a vein of mocking wit which makes it a joy to read, but to take it as a serious attack on poetry would be absurd. Peacock had a zest in poetry as thorough as his dislike of cant and social materialism, and no one familiar with his amused contempt for the claims of science can miss the elaborate irony of his peroration. An 'upper air of intelligence' occupied by politicians and political economists, two classes for whom he had a particular distaste,\* would certainly be no place for poetic aspirations. His attack is not levelled against poetry itself, but partly against the spirit which allowed the so-called 'solid and conducive studies' and 'the progress of useful art and science' to withdraw men's serious attention from poetry, and partly against the eccentricities of those verse-writers of the day who had

\* Instances are many. He attacks Brougham, Lord John Russell, and the Social Science Association in *Gryll Grange*, where Lord Facing-both-ways and Lord Michin Malicho are among the arch-quacks of the Pantoprismatic Society. Brougham is also the 'learned friend' of the Steam Intellect Society (the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge) in *Crotchet Castle*, and Scottish political economy is represented in these two books by the humorous portraits of Mr. MacQuedy (Mac Q.E.D.) and Mr. MacBorrowdale. The delightful skit on Canning's political rhetoric in *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, and the election for the borough of Onevote in *Melin-court*, are probably too well known to need citation here.



succeeded in getting themselves noticed.\* There is plenty of quiet fun in the picture of the Lake Poets among their mountains, 'passing the whole day in the innocent and amiable occupation of going up and down hill, receiving poetical impressions, and communicating them in immortal verse to admiring generations.' Peacock distrusted the trend of contemporary verse almost as much as that of contemporary science, and it was not for another forty years that he made honourable amends † for the ridicule which he had so often indulged. He was himself already a writer of some note in the classical tradition of English poetry, and by 1820 he had published four volumes of

\* This is clear enough in the essay itself, but it is emphasized in the letter of December 4, 1820, which accompanied the presentation copy of *The Four Ages* which Peacock sent to Shelley. 'Considering poetical reputation as a prize to be obtained by a certain species of exertion, and that the sort of thing which obtains this prize is the drivelling doggerel published under the name of "Barry Cornwall," I think but one conclusion possible,—that to a rational ambition poetical reputation is not only not to be desired, but most earnestly to be deprecated. The truth, I am convinced, is, that there is no longer a poetical audience among the higher class of minds; that moral, political, and physical science have entirely withdrawn from poetry the attention of all whose attention is worth having; and that the poetical reading public, being composed of the mere dregs of the intellectual community, the most sufficing passport to their favour must rest on the mixture of a little easily-intelligible portion of mawkish sentiment, with an absolute negation of reason and knowledge. These I take it to be the prime and sole elements of Mr. Barry Cornwall's "Madrigals." ' For the source of this letter, see Bibliographical Note, page xxxiii.

† 'Shakspeare never makes a flower blossom out of season. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey are true to nature, in this and in all other respects: even in their wildest imaginings' (*Gryll Grange*, 1861, p. 204). 'Wordsworth's own genius is in no respect Bacchic: it is neither epic, nor dramatic, nor dithyrambic. He has deep thought and deep feeling, graceful imaginings, great pathos, and little passion. Withal, his Muse is as decorous as Pamela, much of a Vestal, and nothing of a Bacchant' ('The "Flask" of Cratinus,' *Fraser's Magazine*, October 1857).

verse which had been calmly though not unfavourably received. It is possible that a certain amount of disdain, through sense of injured merit, had its unconscious share in sharpening his eager wit against poets whose position was prominent, though not secure.

From 1818 to 1820 Peacock sent frequent parcels of books to Italy, with letters and news of his literary plans. Shelley was thus kept aware of his projects, and was keenly expectant of their results. In August 1818 he writes impatiently, '*Nightmare Abbey* finished. Well, what is in it? What is it? You are as secret as if the priest of Ceres had dictated its sacred pages.' The author's silence was natural, for this novel contained his character of Scythrop, the most brilliant portrait-caricature of Shelley ever drawn. The book reached Italy in the following summer, and Shelley was enthusiastic; he wrote to Peacock: 'I am delighted with *Nightmare Abbey*. I think Scythrop a character admirably conceived and executed; and I know not how to praise sufficiently the lightness, chastity, and strength of the language of the whole.' \*

Holding such an opinion of his friend's work, Shelley naturally awaited the arrival of a poet's attack on poetry with some excitement. He expected it as early as November 1820, when he wrote: 'The box containing my books, and consequently your Essay against the cultivation of poetry, has not arrived; my wonder, meanwhile, in what manner you support such a heresy in this matter of fact and money-loving age, holds me in suspense.' † By the following January it had reached him, and on the 20th he wrote to Ollier: 'I am enchanted with your *Literary Miscellany*, although the last article ‡ it contains has excited my polemical faculties so violently, that the moment I get rid of my ophthalmia, I mean to set about an answer to

\* Peacock's *Memoirs of Shelley*, 1909, p. 133.

† Ibid., p. 190.

‡ *The Four Ages of Poetry*.

it, which I will send to you, if you please. It is very clever, but, I think, very false.' \*

His eyes continued to give him trouble, and it was not till February 15 that he wrote to Peacock: 'I received at the same time your printed denunciations against general, and your written ones † against particular poetry, and I agree with you as decidedly in the latter as I differ in the former. The man whose critical gall is not stirred up by such *ottava rimas* as Barry Cornwall's, may safely be conjectured to possess no gall at all. The world is pale with the sickness of such stuff. At the same time, your anathemas against poetry itself excited me to a sacred rage, or *caloëthes scribendi* of vindicating the insulted Muses. I had the greatest possible desire to break a lance with you, within the lists of a magazine, in honour of my mistress *Urania*; but God willed that I should be too lazy, and wrested the victory from your hope: since, first having unhorsed poetry, and the universal sense of the wisest in all ages, an easy conquest would have remained to you in me, the knight of the shield of shadow and the lance of gossamere. Besides, I was at that moment reading Plato's *Ion*, which I recommend you to reconsider.' ‡

Yet by this time he was really preparing, and on the 22nd he wrote again to Ollier: 'Peacock's essay is at Florence at present. I have sent for it, and will transmit to you my paper [on Poetry] as soon as it is written, which will be in a very few days. Nevertheless, I should be sorry that you delayed your Magazine through any dependence on me. . . . You may expect to hear from me within a week, with the answer to Peacock. I shall endeavour to treat the subject in its elements, and unveil the inmost idol of the error.' §

\* *Shelley Memorials*, 1859, p. 136.

† Peacock's letter of December 4, 1820, already quoted.

‡ Peacock's *Memoirs of Shelley*, 1909, p. 206.

§ *Shelley Memorials*, 1859, p. 154.

All writers know how rapidly such projects are completed in anticipation, and how slowly in painful fact. It was almost a month before the *Defence of Poetry* was ready for the press, and if we may judge from the number of manuscript drafts and transcripts, the time must have been none too long. On March 20, however, Shelley was able to write to Ollier :

‘ I send you the *Defence of Poetry*, Part I. It is transcribed, I hope, legibly.

‘ I have written nothing which I do not think necessary to the subject. Of course, if any expressions should strike you as too unpopular, I give you the power of omitting them; but I trust you will, if possible, refrain from exercising it. In fact, I hope that I have treated the question with that temper and spirit as to silence cavil. I propose to add two other parts in two succeeding *Miscellanies*.<sup>\*</sup> It is to be understood that although you may omit, you do not alter or add.’<sup>†</sup>

This letter was followed next day by a friendly warning to Peacock : ‘ I dispatch by this post the first part of an essay intended to consist of three parts, which I design for an antidote to your *Four Ages of Poetry*. You will see that I have taken a more general view of what is poetry than you have, and will perhaps agree with several of my positions, without considering your own touched. But read and judge ; and do not let us imitate the great founders of the picturesque, Price and Payne Knight, who, like two ill-trained beagles, began snarling at each other when they could not catch the hare.

<sup>\*</sup> The scope of the proposed second part is outlined at the foot of p. 58 of the present edition. Shelley had every intention of completing his *Defence*, and no doubt, if Ollier’s *Miscellany* had continued, the second and third parts would have followed. Six months later, on September 25, 1821, he was still writing to Ollier on the subject : ‘ Pray give me notice against what time you want the second part of my *Defence of Poetry*. I give you this *Defence*, and you may do what you will with it ’ (*Shelley Memorials*, 1859, p. 159).

<sup>†</sup> *Shelley Memorials*, 1859, p. 156.

' I hear the welcome news of a box from England. . . . How much new poetry does it contain ? The Bavii and Maevii of the day are very fertile ; and I wish those who honour me with boxes would read and inwardly digest your *Four Ages of Poetry* ; for I had much rather, for my own private reading, receive political, geological, and moral treatises, than this stuff in *terza*, *ottava*, and *tremillesima rima* whose earthly baseness has attracted the lightning of your indiscriminating censure upon the temple of immortal song.' \*

After so much correspondence and discussion, it would naturally be expected that the *Defence of Poetry* should bear marks of its polemical origin. This was so ; the manuscript dispatched to Ollier contained half a dozen direct references to *The Four Ages* and its author. But Ollier's *Miscellany* was probably not successful ; at any rate, no second number ever appeared, and the manuscript of the *Defence* was transferred to Shelley's friends, the Hunts, for publication in *The Liberal*, a periodical which was to be edited by Leigh Hunt and inspired by Lord Byron. Shelley was drowned, however, on July 8, 1822, returning from a visit to Leghorn on which preparations for *The Liberal* had been arranged with Byron and Hunt. His death removed the only influence which could have kept them in partnership, and *The Liberal* came to an end with its fourth number, in 1823. The *Defence of Poetry* had not yet been set up in type, but John Hunt had read the manuscript for the press. He found it full of allusions to Peacock's article, allusions which might have had their value in a second number of Ollier's *Miscellany* two or three years earlier, but would certainly have been out of place and mystifying in *The Liberal*. Hunt accordingly

\* Peacock's *Memoirs of Shelley*, 1909, p. 208. This letter is strikingly reminiscent of a passage in the *Defence* (the third paragraph from the end, p. 58 of the present edition) which Shelley evidently had in mind as he wrote.



struck them out, and by a little judicious excision the *Defence* was altered from a controversial article to a general treatise on Poetry. This, of course, it already was, or such treatment would have been unsuccessful; but Hunt's manipulation of the manuscript has obscured the far-reaching influence of Peacock's essay upon the whole scheme and structure of the reply. The *Defence* first appeared in 1840, in the *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, by Percy Bysshe Shelley, edited in two volumes by his widow, who naturally wished to present it as an independent expression of Shelley's views. She therefore printed it, as Peacock observed, 'from Mr. Hunt's *rifacciamento*, as she received it. The paper as it now stands is a defence without an attack.' \*

It is the object of the present edition to remedy this unsatisfactory state of things by prefacing the attack to the defence, and thus enabling all who are interested in Shelley's view of poetry to trace, as closely as they please, the means he took as her champion to parry or return the blows of a very skilful opponent. He was deeply moved and excited by the plausible arguments of *The Four Ages*; much more so, probably, than an ordinary man would have been, for Shelley had the defects of his qualities, a limited and grotesque sense of humour, and an active dislike and distrust of the comic spirit.† Fortunately he knew Peacock well enough to be aware of his real sympathies,‡ but he evidently felt that a challenge so

\* Peacock's *Memoirs of Shelley*, 1909, p. 208.

† Plenty of evidence of this dislike of the 'withering and perverting spirit of comedy' can be found in my edition of Peacock's *Memoirs of Shelley*, 1909, pp. 39-41, and of the lack of humour in Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, *passim*.

‡ Peacock says of his *Four Ages of Poetry* that 'Shelley wrote the *Defence of Poetry* as an answer to it; and as he wrote it, it contained many allusions to the article and its author, such as "If I know the knight by the device of his shield, I have only to inscribe Cassandra, Antigone, or Alcestis on mine to blunt the point of his



clever, and so dangerously matter-of-fact in appearance, must not be allowed to pass. His first impulse was to write an open letter to Ollier for publication, and two unfinished drafts of such a letter are preserved among the Shelley MSS. in the Bodleian.\* They show, better than the ultimate reply, the alarmed indignation of the poet. 'So dark a paradox,' he complains, 'may absorb the brightest rays of mind which fall upon it. It is an impious daring attempt to extinguish Imagination, which is the Sun of life, Impious attempt, parricidal & self murdering attempt & would leave to its opponent a secure but an inglorious conquest.'

What really disturbed Shelley was the speciousness, the logical plausibility of Peacock's argument. Relying himself in the affairs of life on instinct and inclination, he had a natural distrust of an opponent who preferred to 'grope his way by the cold & uncertain & borrowed light of that Moon which he calls Reason . . . the watery orb which is the Queen of his pale Heaven.' The position of the anxious poet, fluttering at the sight of a wicked logician, is not without its humorous side.

His outburst emphasizes the radical difference between two men of extraordinary mental power. Peacock's mind was that of a skilled debater, intellectual, acute, satiric; Shelley's was governed by intuition and imagination. In controversy they deal indeed with the same subject, but not on the same plane. This is obvious to anyone who chooses to compare the striking remarks and quotable passages in which both essays abound. The average level of *The Four Ages* is fairly represented by the neat epigrammatic turn of its opening paragraphs. Peacock describes the origin of poetry in a society where 'the first question

spear"; taking one instance of a favourite character from each of the three great Greek tragedians.'—Peacock's *Memoirs of Shelley*, 1909, p. 208.

\* See Appendix.

asked of a stranger is, whether he is a beggar or a thief : the stranger, in reply, usually assumes the first, and awaits a convenient opportunity to prove his claim to the second appellation.' The early poets 'are not only historians but theologians, moralists, and legislators : delivering their oracles *ex cathedrâ*, and being indeed often themselves (as Orpheus and Amphion) regarded as portions and emanations of divinity : building cities with a song, and leading brutes with a symphony ; which are only metaphors for the faculty of leading multitudes by the nose.' Later still, 'to the age of brass in the ancient world succeeded the dark ages, in which the light of the Gospel began to spread over Europe, and in which, by a mysterious and inscrutable dispensation, the darkness thickened with the progress of the light.' However sincerely we may agree with Shelley's solemn retorts, that 'poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world,' and that 'it is an error to impute the ignorance of the dark ages to the Christian doctrines,' there is a point and glitter about the wicked wit of his antagonist which is very entertaining. Moreover, Peacock was an original thinker, and is capable of really illuminating criticism in epigrammatic form. He can often be clever, and he can sometimes be cheap, but at his best he is sagacious as well as brilliant, and throws off phrases which are worth a chapter of uninspired criticism ; phrases such as his casual allusion to Shakespeare and his contemporaries, 'who used time and locality merely because they could not do without them.'

Shelley has nothing of this kind to offer ; his employment of the title of poet laureate as a term of abuse is the only *jeu d'esprit* in the *Defence*. The passages which stay in one's memory are of an altogether different type. There is no superficial glitter ; we linger over these passages because they are seen to be themselves of the very substance of poetry. Many of them are descriptions of it : 'Poetry is a sword of lightning, ever unsheathed, which consumes

the scabbard that would contain it.' 'Poetry ever communicates all the pleasure which men are capable of receiving; it is ever still the light of life; the source of whatever of beautiful or generous or true can have place in an evil time.' 'Poetry turns all things to loveliness.' 'It is as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea, which the coming calm erases, and whose traces remain only, as on the wrinkled sand which paves it.' These sentences, and many others, might be turned into metre with little change of phrase; they corroborate that great verdict of Browning, the best criticism ever uttered upon the natural poetry of Shelley's prose style: 'The musician speaks on the note he sings with; there is no change in the scale, as he diminishes the volume into familiar intercourse.' The strength of this prose does not lie in pure intellect; it lies in the writer's passionate faith in poetry—a faith as strong and pure as a martyr's faith in religion—and in the poetic qualities of imagination, vivid metaphor, and high seriousness which are at his command. Metaphor is as much his natural weapon as wit is Peacock's, and the difference is significant of their comparative poetic rank. Peacock's sympathies as a verse-writer were with the clean-cut methods of the eighteenth century; but Shelley, even in prose, finishes his *Defence* with a coruscation of metaphors worthy of Crashaw: 'Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves.'

To restore Shelley's references to *The Four Ages of Poetry* to their original position in the text would be an undesirable though not an indefensible step. By removing them, John Hunt and Mary Shelley have given the *Defence*

its natural and fitting place, as a general treatise on poetry, on the shelves of thousands to whom Peacock is no more than a name. That Shelley himself would have approved their action we can hardly doubt.\* Peacock, it is true, was the only begetter of the *Defence*, as Stephen Gosson was of Sidney's *Apologie*; but Sidney does not continually drag Gosson's *School of Abuse* into his discussion of a noble subject. For Shelley to have excluded *The Four Ages* would have been infinitely more difficult; the author was his intimate friend, and had himself a touch of genius and a most vigorous mind; as a recent critic has remarked, 'he is the other side to every question.'† Shelley wrote at a white heat of controversy, and with characteristic modesty believed that he was producing a magazine article. Purged after his death of its particular references, the *Defence* has taken rank for what it is, and it would be a poor service to its author to restore the disturbing elements. Yet due account must be taken of them, as it has not been hitherto, in weighing the importance and originality of Shelley's opinions, and in the notes to the present edition the original allusions are printed from his own draft or from Mary Shelley's transcript of the finished copy, and the controversial origin of various parts of the *Defence* is pointed out.

The *Defence of Poetry* owes to Peacock's article the immediate spur of antagonism, but it exhibits very clearly two influences of deeper and more serious effect. Shelley had long been steeped in the work of Plato, and he studied Sidney's *Apologie* with peculiar care now that he had himself a similar task to perform.‡ Like Sidney, he held that poetry is the highest form of literature as well as the earliest, and that such historians as Herodotus, such

\* See the three paragraphs with which the *Defence* concludes.

† Mr. Clive Bell, in *The Athenæum*, February 1911.

‡ Dowden states that 'on March 11 and 12 [1821] Mary read Sidney's "Apology for Poetry"' (*Life of Shelley*, vol. ii, p. 384). His information is evidently derived from Mary Shelley's Journal.

philosophers as Plato, are themselves essentially poets. Like Sidney, he declared in the strongest terms that the verse form is no necessary adjunct,\* 'verse being,' as Sidney says, 'but an ornament and no cause to Poetry, sith there have beene many most excellent Poets that never versified.' Again, both critics lay much stress on the essentially poetic quality of Plato, and Sidney refers in particular to the *Symposium* and *Ion*, two dialogues which Shelley was to translate. Both writers also urge the moral influence exerted by poets in the depiction of heroic character, and the mingling of wisdom with delight which makes the lesson effective. The very turns of phrase in the *Defence*, the 'planetary music' of poetry, the 'low-thoughted envy' of contemporaries, are echoes of the 'Plannet-like Musick' and 'low-creeping objections' of the *Apologie*. Nor is the discovery of such influences a slur upon the value of Shelley's treatise, for though he often recalls the earlier writer, he has a freedom and sweep of his own, and does not descend, as Sidney often did, to practical details and the minutiae of criticism. Shelley preserves always a generous width of treatment, being aided in this by his close acquaintance with Plato's theories of poetry, and he shares with Plato the belief that all who practise any inventive art are poets in the wider sense. When Shelley writes of the connexion of poetry with love, he is influenced by a noble speech of Agathon† in the *Symposium*; when he maintains that poetry takes its origin in the occasional visitations of a divine influence, he has in mind the argument of Socrates† in the *Ion*, that a poet can compose nothing worth calling poetry until he becomes inspired. And though few passages of the

\* Yet though Shelley does not regard metre as essential to poetry, he does demand from the prose writers to whom he gives poetical rank a majestic harmony and rhythm which distinguishes their work from common prose. See pp. 29-30 of the *Defence*.

† See notes to pp. 27, l. 27; 45, l. 31; and 55, l. 1



*Defence* can thus be referred to a direct source in Plato, in comparison with many for which we are indebted to some sentence of Sidney or of Peacock, yet, among the three authors on whom Shelley's treatise was based, it is probable that Plato was nearest to his heart and had most affinity with his own genius and belief.

For when all allowance is made for the influence of other men, Shelley's treatise remains a very personal document. His opinions, whatever their source, are intensely held and enthusiastically conveyed. There is nothing coldly judicial in this piece ; its failures and successes alike owe their existence to the vigour and speed of a creative mind. The poet is sometimes misled by his natural prejudices. He claims precedence for poetry before sculpture, painting and music, and however strongly we may agree with him, it will hardly be for the reason he himself adduces, in contrasting the poet's instrument of language with the vehicles of other forms of art. 'The former,' he says, 'is as a mirror which reflects, the latter as a cloud which enfeebles, the light of which both are mediums of communication.'\* Other artists will hardly accept this, and still less will they allow the suggestion that, except language, 'all other materials, instruments, and conditions of art, have relations among each other, which limit and interpose between conception and expression.' For when a poet's mood is uninspired, language can be quite as intractable a medium as a block of stone or a broken flute, and Shelley might well have taken warning in this matter from his own scornful allusion to the fifty-six variant readings of the first line of the *Orlando Furioso*. And language, unlike the other arts, can make its full appeal only to those who speak the same tongue as the maker.

Shelley's essay indeed contains various lapses, some of them mere formal errors,† others misconceptions of a

\* P. 28.

† He consistently speaks of the Teutonic nations as Celtic.



more personal nature. Among these are the notion that when Homer made of revenge a heroic quality, he was accommodating himself to the misguided opinions of a semi-barbarous age against his better judgement, because 'a poet considers the vices of his contemporaries as the temporary dress in which his creations must be arrayed.' \* The absurdity of attributing such sophisticated duplicity to Homer is patent ; Shelley is simply attempting to endow an early poet with modern views, from sheer disinclination to think of him as no better informed than were his fellows. Milton, in like manner, is made to hold opinions which would have filled with horror that stern Puritan, who modified with nothing more insidious than beauty his task of justifying the ways of God to man. The Satan of *Paradise Lost* is indeed so splendid a heroic figure, the Jehovah so revengeful a tyrant, that they lend some colour to the idea that their creator 'alleged no superiority of moral virtue to his god over his devil.' † But to attribute such a result to the conscious intention of the poet, to the 'bold neglect of a direct moral purpose,' is to survey the theology of the Old Testament with the critical eye of Shelley, rather than with the unquestioning acquiescence of Milton. We cannot twit his zealous devotion with motives subversive of morality merely because he reproduced the deity of the earlier Scriptures with reverent faithfulness, while in the composition of his devil he felt at liberty to use a freer hand, and to bestow some of his own heroic fortitude upon his fiend.

Of the merits of the *Defence* it is not so necessary to speak, for they are manifest. A great poet's confession of faith can never lack value. It is good to keep before us Shelley's tribute to the earlier masters of his art ; better still to read the noble praise which he gives to that art itself, 'which redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man.' Indeed, if it were only as a collection of great sentences on

\* P. 32.

† P. 47.

poetry, 'the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth,' 'the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds,' 'a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted,' the value of the *Defence* would be beyond praise. Shelley's speech is always that of a poet; it is vital with metaphor, and we may not unjustly say of him as he said of Dante, in language which itself carries an echo of the greater days of English verse, 'His very words are instinct with spirit \*; each is as a spark, a burning atom of inextinguishable thought.'

It was this quality in Shelley's prose which more particularly inspired the third piece in this volume. The plain fact is that Browning wrote his essay as a foreword to a collection of spurious letters †; but in this case the plain fact is less important than usual. Of the twenty-five letters in Moxon's publication of 1852, all but two were utter forgeries, pieced out with a few genuine phrases from Shelley's pen; these two were copies, though not direct copies, of genuine originals. If here had been the only ground for the editor's enthusiasm, we might well be startled at its strength. But it is clear that Browning paid very little attention to the letters he was introducing to the world. A professional writer's first step would have been to compare them with the Shelley correspondence already accessible, and the cheat would have been clear at once. Browning took their genuineness for granted, wrote his introduction in Paris (where he probably had no means of comparing the letters with those of the 1840 volume), and evidently regarded the whole affair as a heaven-sent opportunity for airing opinions on Shelley's prose, and Shelley's character, which he had formed long since. ‡

There can be no doubt that Browning fell an easier victim by reason of his long-standing admiration for the

\* *Paradise Lost*, vi. 752: 'Itself instinct with Spirit.'

† See Bibliographical Note, p. xxxii.

‡ See his last paragraph, p. 83.

## INTRODUCTION

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elder poet. The work of Shelley had been the inspiration of his earliest prime, and he had consistently refused, in the face of popular rumour, to believe that there could be any ugliness in a life which produced so beautiful a flower of verse. His earliest poem, *Pauline*, published when he was only twenty, contains a long and impassioned tribute to Shelley as the singer whom he adored :

Sun-treader, life and light be thine for ever !  
Thou art gone from us ; years go by and spring  
Gladdens and the young earth is beautiful,  
Yet thy songs come not, other bards arise,  
But none like thee. . . .

I was thine in shame,  
And now when all thy proud renown is out,  
I am a watcher whose eyes have grown dim  
With looking for some star which breaks on him  
Altered and worn and weak and full of tears.

The discovery of the spurious letters merely offered him a new opportunity for the confession of this early faith, and whether by the manliness and insight of the latter part of his essay, or by the subtle and attractive differentiations of the former, Browning has well atoned for the editorial carelessness to which we owe his work. He wrote little prose, and of that little the Essay on Shelley is by far the finest and most important piece. It is no example of clear or easy writing ; rather is it involved, like his verse, and uneven with the strain and urgency of thought. But though his essay is less lucid than Shelley's, it is not less full of the idylls of a shaping imagination, and as a poet's praise of a poet it is no unworthy sequel to a poet's praise of poetry itself.



## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

PEACOCK'S *Four Ages of Poetry* first appeared anonymously ; it occupied the final pages (183-200) of a publication of 1820, the full title of which was OLLIERS | LITERARY MISCELLANY | IN PROSE AND VERSE | BY SEVERAL HANDS | TO BE CONTINUED OCCASIONALLY | No. 1. No second number ever appeared, and the first is now exceedingly scarce.\* *The Four Ages* was reprinted in 1875 in Sir Henry Cole's collected edition of Peacock's works, in 1880 as an Appendix to the third volume of Forman's edition of *Shelley's Prose Works*, and again in 1891 and 1899 in a volume entitled *Calidore and Miscellanea* in the edition of Peacock's novels edited by Richard Garnett. Garnett does not appear to have read his proofs, and no confidence can be placed in his text, which (*inter alia*) distorts Peacock's printed statement that ' the iron age of classical poetry may be called the bardic ; the golden, the Homeric ' ; into ' the iron age of classical poetry may be called the barbaric of the golden, the Homeric.'

The present text of *The Four Ages* is a verbatim reprint of the first and only authoritative text, that published by Ollier.

\* It is not in the Bodleian, and the British Museum had mislaid their only copy when I required it. I am glad to acknowledge the indebtedness of my text to the private library of Mr. P. J. Dobell, who generously placed his copy of the *Miscellany* at my disposal for so long as it was needed.

*A Defence of Poetry* was first published in 1840, in Volume I (pp. 1-57) of Mary Shelley's two volumes of ESSAYS, | LETTERS FROM ABROAD, | TRANSLATIONS AND FRAGMENTS, | BY PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY. It was reprinted in the second edition of 1845\*, which corrects some misprints, and the third edition of 1852 follows that of 1845. Its previous history has already been stated (Introduction, pp. xii-xvi).

The earliest holograph draft of the *Defence* known to exist, written in a thick vellum-bound quarto note-book, is preserved in the Bodleian Library. This draft, MS. Shelley d. 1, differs considerably in details from the final version, and includes various passages ultimately rejected, while it omits others (the longest of them extending from p. 33, l. 10 to p. 39, l. 8 of the present edition) ultimately included. It contains one specific reference to Peacock and *The Four Ages* which found no place in Shelley's final version of the *Defence*; this passage is quoted in a note to p. 51, l. 34 of the present edition.

There also exists, in the possession of Sir John C. E. Shelley, a holograph MS. of a portion only of a fair copy of the *Defence* which approximates very closely to its final form. This MS. extends from 'performers of equal skill' (p. 28 of the present edition) to 'once contemplated them' (p. 33); then a page of the MS. is missing, and it continues from 'Poetry strengthens the faculty' (p. 33) to 'an age unworthy of him' (p. 38). These portions of the *Defence* are contained in a manuscript note-book which was recovered from the hull of the *Ariel* after Shelley's death, and the pages containing them have fortunately escaped irreparable damage from sea-water. The existence of this MS. was mentioned by Richard Garnett in his *Relics of*

\* The sheets of this volume were reissued by Moxon in *The Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 1847. I am indebted to Mr. W. E. Peck, of Exeter College, for his kindness in lending me copies of the 1845 and 1852 editions, and for several valuable suggestions.



*Shelley*, 1862, p. 48, where he misleadingly speaks of 'a fair copy of the *Defence of Poetry*,' as if it were complete. More recently this fragment has been published, with a description of the MS., by Mr. Roger Ingpen in his *Shelley in England*, 1917. Mr. Ingpen's own photographs of part of the MS. show the occasional inaccuracy of his text.

From Forman's prefatory note to the *Defence*, in the third volume of his edition of *Shelley's Prose Works*, 1880, it appears that a further holograph fragment exists. Forman writes: 'In the MS. Note-book, however, containing the Notes on Sculpture, &c., is a fragment of the original *Defence*, including one of the cancelled references to *The Four Ages*.' This fragment is quoted in a note to p. 49, l. 22 of the present edition.

There were also, among the Shelley MSS. used by Garnett, a couple of short passages, presumably holograph, which appear to be alternative drafts of certain parts of the *Defence*. In the present edition they will be found in a note to p. 23.

In addition to the holograph draft and fragments, there are two complete contemporary MS. transcripts of the finished *Defence*. Of these the more important is in the Bodleian Library, where it is numbered MS. Shelley e. 6. It is a fair copy written out by Mary Shelley on sixteen leaves of paper of a large octavo size, about  $8\frac{1}{2} \times 5$  inches. Pages 1-31 are covered with the text of the *Defence*, very closely and neatly written, p. 1 being headed 'Defence of Poetry. Part First.' The stitched manuscript sheets, now preserved loose in a folding cover, have been folded in three, evidently for transmission by post, and docketed by Mary Shelley in the middle division of the outside blank page (p. 31 verso) 'A Defence of Poetry, or Remarks suggested by an Essay entitled "The four ages of Poetry." Part I.,' the sub-title being carefully cancelled in ink. This MS. is evidently the one submitted first to Ollier and later to

John Hunt, for it contains all but one \* of the alterations for the press by which the specific references to Peacock and *The Four Ages* were removed. These alterations are made, presumably by the hand of John Hunt himself, in ink much blacker than the brown ink of the original MS. In addition to the cancellation of the sub-title, there are in the first edition of the *Defence* five passages in which allusions to *The Four Ages* and its author, contained in Shelley's final revised text, have been carefully removed or obscured. In the present edition, for reasons already stated (Introduction, pp. xix-xx), these passages are not restored in the text itself, but they will be found quoted in full in the notes to pages 36, 49, 51, and 58.

The existence of a second transcript of the *Defence* is vouched for by Forman, who possessed 'a complete MS. of it in the handwriting of Miss Clairmont; but, though it presents some variations from the printed text, it would seem to be copied, not from the original, but from the *rifacciamiento*.' From these words it seems probable that Jane Clairmont made her copy direct from Mary Shelley's transcript (e. 6.), which Forman had not seen, but she must also have had access to a lost holograph MS. by Shelley. In the phrase at p. 36, l. 32, 'the periods of the growth,' which is not found in d. 1, Mary Shelley leaves a blank space in e. 6 for the word 'periods,' which she evidently failed to decipher in Shelley's MS. By the date of the publication of the *Essays* in 1840 she had made it out, and it duly appears there; but Jane Clairmont's MS. is said by Forman to read: 'the quick growth.' In Shelley's rough scrawl 'period' would not be unlike 'quick,' and Jane Clairmont evidently jumped at the latter interpretation and ignored the following 'of the.'

Of the printed editions, four deserve mention. The *editio princeps* of 1840 was prepared under the direct supervision of Mary Shelley, who must have had before her,

\* See note to p. 49, l. 28 of the present edition;

besides the lost holograph, the two most important of the known MSS., the holograph draft (d. 1) and her own fair copy corrected by John Hunt (e. 6). She probably made a fresh copy for the press, based on e. 6, which shows no signs of having passed through a compositor's hands. Moreover, one of the Peacock references \* (removed in the first edition) remains uncanceled in e. 6, and so do a number of words here and there which were changed, sometimes to the reading of d. 1, in the printed text.

The second edition (1845) corrects a few obvious misprints in the first. Forman's text of the *Defence*, in the third volume of his *Shelley's Prose Works* (1880), is the outcome of his collation of the 1840 and 1852 editions and Jane Clairmont's transcript; with these before him he 'as a rule silently adopted the best reading in each case.' Finally, in 1910 M. A. H. Koszul printed the *Defence* from Mary Shelley's transcript (e. 6), with notes of certain important variations in Shelley's holograph draft (d. 1). M. Koszul's edition is valuable as giving the text of Mary Shelley's transcript before it was corrected for the press, but his carelessness is at times remarkable.†

A Variorum edition of the *Defence*, containing the many differences of reading, mostly trivial, between the various authoritative sources would be a very laborious and not very useful undertaking. In the present edition the text of the *editio princeps* of 1840 is reprinted verbatim, except

\* See note to p. 49, l. 28 of the present edition.

† For instance, M. Koszul gives from Shelley's holograph draft (d. 1) some sentences alternative to that printed at p. 41, l. 28, of the present edition. The first sentence he prints as 'Yet Poetry lived & lived in Rome, contemporaneously with all the other arts which add beauty & divinity to the condition of man; except that of civil institution.' What Shelley's draft actually contains, however, is 'Yet Poetry lived & lived in its intensest splendour in Rome, contemporaneously with all the other arts which add beauty & dignity to the condition of man; except in the instance of Rome that of civil institution.'

that ten obvious misprints, which were silently corrected in the second edition, are rectified.\* The various references to Peacock and *The Four Ages of Poetry* are restored in the notes, and a few striking passages from the original holograph draft (d. 1) are also given there. Shelley's rough drafts, at the end of d. 1, of the proposed letter to Ollier—the form which his reply to Peacock was first intended to take—are of real interest, and are printed in an appendix.†

Browning's *Essay on Shelley*—to give it its usual title—was first printed in 1852 as the 'Introductory Essay' to a volume of *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley* published by Edward Moxon. These letters were forgeries,‡ fabricated by an obscure adventurer who called himself a son of Lord Byron. From him they passed to White, a Pall Mall bookseller, who disposed of them by public auction to Moxon, and Moxon, having bought them in all good faith, secured Browning as editor, and published the letters with his introduction early in 1852. The reviewers saw nothing wrong, but F. T. Palgrave happened to recognize part of a *Quarterly* article by his own father in a letter supposed to have been addressed by Shelley to Godwin twenty-one years before. The fraud was out§; the post-marks were referred to the inspection of post office experts, and condemned; and when the anxious Moxon carried the forged letters to Peacock for an authoritative opinion on the handwriting, it was given decisively against them. There was nothing for it but to suppress the book, and it is now consequently rare.

The chief editions of Browning's *Essay* hitherto published

\* See Textual Emendations, p. 111.

† These drafts were printed by M. Koszul in his volume of 1910, but Shelley's rough script is not easily legible, and M. Koszul misread, or failed to read at all, some important words.

‡ See Introduction, p. xxiv. The letters are now in the British Museum, Add. MS. 19377.

§ See *The Athenæum* for March 6 and 20, 1852.

have been edited by W. Tyas Harding for the Shelley Society, in 1888, and by Richard Garnett, with a full introduction, in 1903. The present text is a verbatim reprint from the copy of the original volume of 1852 preserved in the Bodleian Library.

For the text of Peacock's letter of December 4, 1820, quoted on p. xi, I have to rely on a privately printed volume of *Letters and Fragments* by Peacock, edited by Richard Garnett for the Bibliophile Society, Boston, in 1910. Garnett states that 'the Letters to Shelley are in the Bodleian Library, along with other papers long withheld from public inspection. A few copies were privately printed many years ago.' I presume that his text is derived from one of these copies, as no such letters are among the accessible Bodleian MSS., and Bodley's Librarian, who has kindly examined the reserved Shelley papers for me, tells me that they contain no letters from Peacock to Shelley!

H. F. B. B.-S.





THE FOUR AGES OF POETRY

BY THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK



## THE FOUR AGES OF POETRY

Qui inter hæc nutriuntur non magis sapere possunt, quam bene  
olere qui in culinâ habitant.

PETRONIUS.

POETRY, like the world, may be said to have four ages, but in a different order: the first age of poetry being the age of iron; the second, of gold; the third, of silver; and the fourth, of brass.

The first, or iron age of poetry, is that in which rude bards celebrate in rough numbers the exploits of ruder chiefs, in days when every man is a warrior, and when the great practical maxim of every form of society, "to keep what we have and to catch what we can," is not yet disguised under names of justice and forms of law, but is the naked motto of the naked sword, which is the only judge and jury in every question of *meum* and *tuum*. In these days, the only three trades flourishing (besides that of priest which flourishes always) are those of king, thief, and beggar: the beggar being for the most part a king deject, and the thief a king expectant. The first question asked of a stranger is, whether he is a beggar or a thief\*: the stranger, in reply, usually assumes the first, and awaits a convenient opportunity to prove his claim to the second appellation.

The natural desire of every man to engross to himself as much power and property as he can acquire by any of the means which might makes right, is accompanied by

\* See the *Odyssey*, *passim*: and *Thucydides*, I. 5.

the no less natural desire of making known to as many people as possible the extent to which he has been a winner in this universal game. The successful warrior becomes a chief; the successful chief becomes a king: his next want is an organ to disseminate the fame of his achievements and the extent of his possessions; and this organ he finds in a bard, who is always ready to celebrate the strength of his arm, being first duly inspired by that of his liquor. This is the origin of poetry, which, like all other trades, takes its rise in the demand for the commodity, and flourishes in proportion to the extent of the market.

Poetry is thus in its origin panegyric. The first rude songs of all nations appear to be a sort of brief historical notices, in a strain of tumid hyperbole, of the exploits and possessions of a few pre-eminent individuals. They tell us how many battles such an one has fought, how many helmets he has cleft, how many breastplates he has pierced, how many widows he has made, how much land he has appropriated, how many houses he has demolished for other people, what a large one he has built for himself, how much gold he has stowed away in it, and how liberally and plentifully he pays, feeds, and intoxicates the divine and immortal bards, the sons of Jupiter, but for whose everlasting songs the names of heroes would perish.

This is the first stage of poetry before the invention of written letters. The numerical modulation is at once useful as a help to memory, and pleasant to the ears of uncultured men, who are easily caught by sound: and from the exceeding flexibility of the yet unformed language, the poet does no violence to his ideas in subjecting them to the fetters of number. The savage indeed lisps in numbers, and all rude and uncivilized people express themselves in the manner which we call poetical.

The scenery by which he is surrounded, and the superstitions which are the creed of his age, form the poet's mind. Rocks, mountains, seas, unsubdued forests, un-



navigable rivers, surround him with forms of power and mystery, which ignorance and fear have peopled with spirits, under multifarious names of gods, goddesses, nymphs, genii, and dæmons. Of all these personages marvellous tales are in existence : the nymphs are not indifferant to handsome young men, and the gentlemen-genii are much troubled and very troublesome with a propensity to be rude to pretty maidens : the bard therefore finds no difficulty in tracing the genealogy of his chief to any of the deities in his neighbourhood with whom the said chief may be most desirous of claiming relationship.

In this pursuit, as in all others, some of course will attain a very marked pre-eminence ; and these will be held in high honour, like Demodocus in the *Odyssey*, and will be consequently inflated with boundless vanity, like *Thamyris* in the *Iliad*. Poets are as yet the only historians and chroniclers of their time, and the sole depositories of all the knowledge of their age ; and though this knowledge is rather a crude congeries of traditional phantasies than a collection of useful truths, yet, such as it is, they have it to themselves. They are observing and thinking, while others are robbing and fighting : and though their object be nothing more than to secure a share of the spoil, yet they accomplish this end by intellectual, not by physical, power : their success excites emulation to the attainment of intellectual eminence : thus they sharpen their own wits and awaken those of others, at the same time that they gratify vanity and amuse curiosity. A skilful display of the little knowledge they have gains them credit for the possession of much more which they have not. Their familiarity with the secret history of gods and genii obtains for them, without much difficulty, the reputation of inspiration ; thus they are not only historians but theologians, moralists, and legislators : delivering their oracles *ex cathedrâ*, and being indeed often themselves (as *Orpheus* and *Amphion*) regarded as portions and

emanations of divinity: building cities with a song, and leading brutes with a symphony; which are only metaphors for the faculty of leading multitudes by the nose.

The golden age of poetry finds its materials in the age of iron. This age begins when poetry begins to be retrospective; when something like a more extended system of civil polity is established; when personal strength and courage avail less to the aggrandizing of their possessor and to the making and marring of kings and kingdoms, and are checked by organized bodies, social institutions, and hereditary successions. Men also live more in the light of truth and within the interchange of observation; and thus perceive that the agency of gods and genii is not so frequent among themselves as, to judge from the songs and legends of the past time, it was among their ancestors. From these two circumstances, really diminished personal power, and apparently diminished familiarity with gods and genii, they very easily and naturally deduce two conclusions: 1st, That men are degenerated, and 2nd, That they are less in favour with the gods. The people of the petty states and colonies, which have now acquired stability and form, which owed their origin and first prosperity to the talents and courage of a single chief, magnify their founder through the mists of distance and tradition, and perceive him achieving wonders with a god or goddess always at his elbow. They find his name and his exploits thus magnified and accompanied in their traditionary songs, which are their only memorials. All that is said of him is in this character. There is nothing to contradict it. The man and his exploits and his tutelary deities are mixed and blended in one invariable association. The marvellous too is very much like a snowball: it grows as it rolls downward, till the little nucleus of truth which began its descent from the summit is hidden in the accumulation of superinduced hyperbole.

When tradition, thus adorned and exaggerated, has

surrounded the founders of families and states with so much adventitious power and magnificence, there is no praise which a living poet can, without fear of being kicked for clumsy flattery, address to a living chief, that will not still leave the impression that the latter is not so great a man as his ancestors. The man must in this case be praised through his ancestors. Their greatness must be established, and he must be shown to be their worthy descendant. All the people of a state are interested in the founder of their state. All states that have harmonized into a common form of society, are interested in their respective founders. All men are interested in their ancestors. All men love to look back into the days that are past. In these circumstances traditional national poetry is reconstructed and brought like chaos into order and form. The interest is more universal : understanding is enlarged : passion still has scope and play : character is still various and strong : nature is still unsubdued and existing in all her beauty and magnificence, and men are not yet excluded from her observation by the magnitude of cities or the daily confinement of civic life : poetry is more an art : it requires greater skill in numbers, greater command of language, more extensive and various knowledge, and greater comprehensiveness of mind. It still exists without rivals in any other department of literature ; and even the arts, painting and sculpture certainly, and music probably, are comparatively rude and imperfect. The whole field of intellect is its own. It has no rivals in history, nor in philosophy, nor in science. It is cultivated by the greatest intellects of the age, and listened to by all the rest. This is the age of Homer, the golden age of poetry. Poetry has now attained its perfection : it has attained the point which it cannot pass : genius therefore seeks new forms for the treatment of the same subjects : hence the lyric poetry of Pindar and Alcæus, and the tragic poetry of Æschylus and Sophocles. The favour of kings, the honour

of the Olympic crown, the applause of present multitudes, all that can feed vanity and stimulate rivalry, await the successful cultivator of this art, till its forms become exhausted, and new rivals arise around it in new fields of literature, which gradually acquire more influence as, with the progress of reason and civilization, facts become more interesting than fiction : indeed the maturity of poetry may be considered the infancy of history. The transition from Homer to Herodotus is scarcely more remarkable than that from Herodotus to Thucydides : in the gradual dereliction of fabulous incident and ornamented language, Herodotus is as much a poet in relation to Thucydides as Homer is in relation to Herodotus. The history of Herodotus is half a poem : it was written while the whole field of literature yet belonged to the Muses, and the nine books of which it was composed were therefore of right, as well as of courtesy, superinscribed with their nine names.

Speculations, too, and disputes, on the nature of man and of mind ; on moral duties and on good and evil ; on the animate and inanimate components of the visible world ; begin to share attention with the eggs of Leda and the horns of Io, and to draw off from poetry a portion of its once undivided audience.

Then comes the silver age, or the poetry of civilized life. This poetry is of two kinds, imitative and original. The imitative consists in recasting, and giving an exquisite polish to, the poetry of the age of gold : of this Virgil is the most obvious and striking example. The original is chiefly comic, didactic, or satiric : as in Menander, Aristophanes, Horace, and Juvenal. The poetry of this age is characterized by an exquisite and fastidious selection of words, and a laboured and somewhat monotonous harmony of expression : but its monotony consists in this, that experience having exhausted all the varieties of modulation, the civilized poetry selects the most beautiful, and prefers the repetition of these to ranging through

the variety of all. But the best expression being that into which the idea naturally falls, it requires the utmost labour and care so to reconcile the inflexibility of civilized language and the laboured polish of versification with the idea intended to be expressed, that sense may not appear to be sacrificed to sound. Hence numerous efforts and rare success.

This state of poetry is however a step towards its extinction. Feeling and passion are best painted in, and roused by, ornamental and figurative language ; but the reason and the understanding are best addressed in the simplest and most unvarnished phrase. Pure reason and dispassionate truth would be perfectly ridiculous in verse, as we may judge by versifying one of Euclid's demonstrations. This will be found true of all dispassionate reasoning whatever, and all reasoning that requires comprehensive views and enlarged combinations. It is only the more tangible points of morality, those which command assent at once, those which have a mirror in every mind, and in which the severity of reason is warmed and rendered palatable by being mixed up with feeling and imagination, that are applicable even to what is called moral poetry : and as the sciences of morals and of mind advance towards perfection, as they become more enlarged and comprehensive in their views, as reason gains the ascendancy in them over imagination and feeling, poetry can no longer accompany them in their progress, but drops into the back ground, and leaves them to advance alone.

Thus the empire of thought is withdrawn from poetry, as the empire of facts had been before. In respect of the latter, the poet of the age of iron celebrates the achievements of his contemporaries ; the poet of the age of gold celebrates the heroes of the age of iron ; the poet of the age of silver re-casts the poems of the age of gold : we may here see how very slight a ray of historical truth is sufficient to dissipate all the illusions of poetry. We know no more



of the men than of the gods of the Iliad ; no more of Achilles than we do of Thetis ; no more of Hector and Andromache than we do of Vulcan and Venus : these belong altogether to poetry ; history has no share in them : but Virgil knew better than to write an epic about Cæsar ; he left him to Livy ; and travelled out of the confines of truth and history into the old regions of poetry and fiction.

Good sense and elegant learning, conveyed in polished and somewhat monotonous verse, are the perfection of the original and imitative poetry of civilized life. Its range is limited, and when exhausted, nothing remains but the *crambe repetita* of common-place, which at length becomes thoroughly wearisome, even to the most indefatigable readers of the newest new nothings.

It is now evident that poetry must either cease to be cultivated, or strike into a new path. The poets of the age of gold have been imitated and repeated till no new imitation will attract notice : the limited range of ethical and didactic poetry is exhausted : the associations of daily life in an advanced state of society are of very dry, methodical, unpoetical matters-of-fact : but there is always a multitude of listless idlers, yawning for amusement, and gaping for novelty : and the poet makes it his glory to be foremost among their purveyors.

Then comes the age of brass, which, by rejecting the polish and the learning of the age of silver, and taking a retrograde stride to the barbarisms and crude traditions of the age of iron, professes to return to nature and revive the age of gold. This is the second childhood of poetry. To the comprehensive energy of the Homeric Muse, which, by giving at once the grand outline of things, presented to the mind a vivid picture in one or two verses, inimitable alike in simplicity and magnificence, is substituted a verbose and minutely-detailed description of thoughts, passions, actions, persons, and things, in that loose rambling style



of verse, which any one may write, *stans pede in uno*, at the rate of two hundred lines in an hour. To this age may be referred all the poets who flourished in the decline of the Roman Empire. The best specimen of it, though not the most generally known, is the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus, which contains many passages of exceeding beauty in the midst of masses of amplification and repetition.

The iron age of classical poetry may be called the bardic ; the golden, the Homeric ; the silver, the Virgilian ; and the brass, the Nonnic.

Modern poetry has also its four ages : but " it wears its rue with a difference."

To the age of brass in the ancient world succeeded the dark ages, in which the light of the Gospel began to spread over Europe, and in which, by a mysterious and inscrutable dispensation, the darkness thickened with the progress of the light. The tribes that overran the Roman Empire brought back the days of barbarism, but with this difference, that there were many books in the world, many places in which they were preserved, and occasionally some one by whom they were read, who indeed (if he escaped being burned *pour l'amour de Dieu*,) generally lived an object of mysterious fear, with the reputation of magician, alchemist, and astrologer. The emerging of the nations of Europe from this superinduced barbarism, and their settling into new forms of polity, was accompanied, as the first ages of Greece had been, with a wild spirit of adventure, which, co-operating with new manners and new superstitions, raised up a fresh crop of chimæras, not less fruitful, though far less beautiful, than those of Greece. The semi-deification of women by the maxims of the age of chivalry, combining with these new fables, produced the romance of the middle ages. The founders of the new line of heroes took the place of the demi-gods of Grecian poetry. Charlemagne and his Paladins, Arthur and his knights of the round table, the heroes of the iron age of chivalrous

poetry, were seen through the same magnifying mist of distance, and their exploits were celebrated with even more extravagant hyperbole. These legends, combined with the exaggerated love that pervades the songs of the troubadours, the reputation of magic that attached to learned men, the infant wonders of natural philosophy, the crazy fanaticism of the crusades, the power and privileges of the great feudal chiefs, and the holy mysteries of monks and nuns, formed a state of society in which no two laymen could meet without fighting, and in which the three staple ingredients of lover, prize-fighter, and fanatic, that composed the basis of the character of every true man, were mixed up and diversified, in different individuals and classes, with so many distinctive excellencies, and under such an infinite motley variety of costume, as gave the range of a most extensive and picturesque field to the two great constituents of poetry, love and battle.

From these ingredients of the iron age of modern poetry, dispersed in the rhymes of minstrels and the songs of the troubadours, arose the golden age, in which the scattered materials were harmonized and blended about the time of the revival of learning; but with this peculiar difference, that Greek and Roman literature pervaded all the poetry of the golden age of modern poetry, and hence resulted a heterogeneous compound of all ages and nations in one picture; an infinite licence, which gave to the poet the free range of the whole field of imagination and memory. This was carried very far by Ariosto, but farthest of all by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, who used time and locality merely because they could not do without them, because every action must have its when and where: but they made no scruple of deposing a Roman Emperor by an Italian Count, and sending him off in the disguise of a French pilgrim to be shot with a blunderbuss by an English archer. This makes the old English drama very picturesque, at any rate, in the variety of costume, and

very diversified in action and character ; though it is a picture of nothing that ever was seen on earth except a Venetian carnival.

The greatest of English poets, Milton, may be said to stand alone between the ages of gold and silver, combining the excellencies of both ; for with all the energy, and power, and freshness of the first, he united all the studied and elaborate magnificence of the second.

The silver age succeeded ; beginning with Dryden, coming to perfection with Pope, and ending with Goldsmith, Collins, and Gray.

Cowper divested verse of its exquisite polish ; he thought in metre, but paid more attention to his thoughts than his verse. It would be difficult to draw the boundary of prose and blank verse between his letters and his poetry.

The silver age was the reign of authority ; but authority now began to be shaken, not only in poetry but in the whole sphere of its dominion. The contemporaries of Gray and Cowper were deep and elaborate thinkers. The subtle scepticism of Hume, the solemn irony of Gibbon, the daring paradoxes of Rousseau, and the biting ridicule of Voltaire, directed the energies of four extraordinary minds to shake every portion of the reign of authority. Enquiry was roused, the activity of intellect was excited, and poetry came in for its share of the general result. The changes had been rung on lovely maid and sylvan shade, summer heat and green retreat, waving trees and sighing breeze, gentle swains and amorous pains, by versifiers who took them on trust, as meaning something very soft and tender, without much caring what : but with this general activity of intellect came a necessity for even poets to appear to know something of what they professed to talk of. Thomson and Cowper looked at the trees and hills which so many ingenious gentlemen had rhymed about so long without looking at them at all, and the effect of the operation on poetry was like the discovery of a new world.

Painting shared the influence, and the principles of picturesque beauty were explored by adventurous essayists with indefatigable pertinacity. The success which attended these experiments, and the pleasure which resulted from them, had the usual effect of all new enthusiasms, that of turning the heads of a few unfortunate persons, the patriarchs of the age of brass, who, mistaking the prominent novelty for the all-important totality, seem to have ratiocinated much in the following manner: "Poetical genius is the finest of all things, and we feel that we have more of it than any one ever had. The way to bring it to perfection is to cultivate poetical impressions exclusively. Poetical impressions can be received only among natural scenes: for all that is artificial is anti-poetical. Society is artificial, therefore we will live out of society. The mountains are natural, therefore we will live in the mountains. There we shall be shining models of purity and virtue, passing the whole day in the innocent and amiable occupation of going up and down hill, receiving poetical impressions, and communicating them in immortal verse to admiring generations." To some such perversion of intellect we owe that egregious confraternity of rhymesters, known by the name of the Lake Poets; who certainly did receive and communicate to the world some of the most extraordinary poetical impressions that ever were heard of, and ripened into models of public virtue, too splendid to need illustration. They wrote verses on a new principle; saw rocks and rivers in a new light; and remaining studiously ignorant of history, society, and human nature, cultivated the phantasy only at the expence of the memory and the reason; and contrived, though they had retreated from the world for the express purpose of seeing nature as she was, to see her only as she was not, converting the land they lived in into a sort of fairy-land, which they peopled with mysticisms and chimæras. This gave what is called a new tone to poetry, and conjured

up a herd of desperate imitators, who have brought the age of brass prematurely to its dotage.

The descriptive poetry of the present day has been called by its cultivators a return to nature. Nothing is more impertinent than this pretension. Poetry cannot travel out of the regions of its birth, the uncultivated lands of semi-civilized men. Mr. Wordsworth, the great leader of the returners to nature, cannot describe a scene under his own eyes without putting into it the shadow of a Danish boy or the living ghost of Lucy Gray, or some similar phantastical parturition of the moods of his own mind.

In the origin and perfection of poetry, all the associations of life were composed of poetical materials. With us it is decidedly the reverse. We know too that there are no Dryads in Hyde-park nor Naiads in the Regent's-canal. But barbaric manners and supernatural interventions are essential to poetry. Either in the scene, or in the time, or in both, it must be remote from our ordinary perceptions. While the historian and the philosopher are advancing in, and accelerating, the progress of knowledge, the poet is wallowing in the rubbish of departed ignorance, and raking up the ashes of dead savages to find gewgaws and rattles for the grown babies of the age. Mr. Scott digs up the poachers and cattle-stealers of the ancient border. Lord Byron cruizes for thieves and pirates on the shores of the Morea and among the Greek Islands. Mr. Southey wades through ponderous volumes of travels and old chronicles, from which he carefully selects all that is false, useless, and absurd, as being essentially poetical ; and when he has a commonplace book full of monstrosities, strings them into an epic. Mr. Wordsworth picks up village legends from old women and sextons ; and Mr. Coleridge, to the valuable information acquired from similar sources, superadds the dreams of crazy theologians and the mysticisms of German metaphysics, and favours the world



with visions in verse, in which the quadruple elements of sexton, old woman, Jeremy Taylor, and Emanuel Kant, are harmonized into a delicious poetical compound. Mr. Moore presents us with a Persian, and Mr. Campbell with a Pennsylvanian tale, both formed on the same principle as Mr. Southey's epics, by extracting from a perfunctory and desultory perusal of a collection of voyages and travels, all that useful investigation would not seek for and that common sense would reject.

These disjointed relics of tradition and fragments of second-hand observation, being woven into a tissue of verse, constructed on what Mr. Coleridge calls a new principle (that is, no principle at all), compose a modern-antique compound of frippery and barbarism, in which the puling sentimentality of the present time is grafted on the misrepresented ruggedness of the past into a heterogeneous congeries of unamalgamating manners, sufficient to impose on the common readers of poetry, over whose understandings the poet of this class possesses that commanding advantage, which, in all circumstances and conditions of life, a man who knows something, however little, always possesses over one who knows nothing.

A poet in our times is a semi-barbarian in a civilized community. He lives in the days that are past. His ideas, thoughts, feelings, associations, are all with barbarous manners, obsolete customs, and exploded superstitions. The march of his intellect is like that of a crab, backward. The brighter the light diffused around him by the progress of reason, the thicker is the darkness of antiquated barbarism, in which he buries himself like a mole, to throw up the barren hillocks of his Cimmerian labours. The philosophic mental tranquillity which looks round with an equal eye on all external things, collects a store of ideas, discriminates their relative value, assigns to all their proper place, and from the materials of useful knowledge thus collected, appreciated, and arranged, forms



new combinations that impress the stamp of their power and utility on the real business of life, is diametrically the reverse of that frame of mind which poetry inspires, or from which poetry can emanate. The highest inspirations of poetry are resolvable into three ingredients: the rant of unregulated passion, the whining of exaggerated feeling, and the cant of factitious sentiment: and can therefore serve only to ripen a splendid lunatic like Alexander, a puling driveller like Werter, or a morbid dreamer like Wordsworth. It can never make a philosopher, nor a statesman, nor in any class of life an useful or rational man. It cannot claim the slightest share in any one of the comforts and utilities of life of which we have witnessed so many and so rapid advances. But though not useful, it may be said it is highly ornamental, and deserves to be cultivated for the pleasure it yields. Even if this be granted, it does not follow that a writer of poetry in the present state of society is not a waster of his own time, and a robber of that of others. Poetry is not one of those arts which, like painting, require repetition and multiplication, in order to be diffused among society. There are more good poems already existing than are sufficient to employ that portion of life which any mere reader and recipient of poetical impressions should devote to them, and these having been produced in poetical times, are far superior in all the characteristics of poetry to the artificial reconstructions of a few morbid ascetics in unpoetical times. To read the promiscuous rubbish of the present time to the exclusion of the select treasures of the past, is to substitute the worse for the better variety of the same mode of enjoyment.

But in whatever degree poetry is cultivated, it must necessarily be to the neglect of some branch of useful study: and it is a lamentable spectacle to see minds, capable of better things, running to seed in the specious indolence of these empty aimless mockeries of intellectual exertion.

Poetry was the mental rattle that awakened the attention of intellect in the infancy of civil society : but for the maturity of mind to make a serious business of the playthings of its childhood, is as absurd as for a full-grown man to rub his gums with coral, and cry to be charmed to sleep by the jingle of silver bells.

As to that small portion of our contemporary poetry, which is neither descriptive, nor narrative, nor dramatic, and which, for want of a better name, may be called ethical, the most distinguished portion of it, consisting merely of querulous, egotistical rhapsodies, to express the writer's high dissatisfaction with the world and every thing in it, serves only to confirm what has been said of the semi-barbarous character of poets, who from singing dithyrambs and "Io 'Triumphe," while society was savage, grow rabid, and out of their element, as it becomes polished and enlightened.

Now when we consider that it is not the thinking and studious, and scientific and philosophical part of the community, not to those whose minds are bent on the pursuit and promotion of permanently useful ends and aims, that poets must address their minstrelsy, but to that much larger portion of the reading public, whose minds are not awakened to the desire of valuable knowledge, and who are indifferent to any thing beyond being charmed, moved, excited, affected, and exalted : charmed by harmony, moved by sentiment, excited by passion, affected by pathos, and exalted by sublimity : harmony, which is language on the rack of Procrustes ; sentiment, which is canting egotism in the mask of refined feeling ; passion, which is the commotion of a weak and selfish mind ; pathos, which is the whining of an unmanly spirit ; and sublimity, which is the inflation of an empty head : when we consider that the great and permanent interests of human society become more and more the main spring of intellectual pursuit ; that in proportion as they become so,

the subordination of the ornamental to the useful will be more and more seen and acknowledged ; and that therefore the progress of useful art and science, and of moral and political knowledge, will continue more and more to withdraw attention from frivolous and uncondusive, to solid and conducive studies : that therefore the poetical audience will not only continually diminish in the proportion of its number to that of the rest of the reading public, but will also sink lower and lower in the comparison of intellectual acquirement : when we consider that the poet must still please his audience, and must therefore continue to sink to their level, while the rest of the community is rising above it : we may easily conceive that the day is not distant, when the degraded state of every species of poetry will be as generally recognized as that of dramatic poetry has long been : and this not from any decrease either of intellectual power, or intellectual acquisition, but because intellectual power and intellectual acquisition have turned themselves into other and better channels, and have abandoned the cultivation and the fate of poetry to the degenerate fry of modern rhymesters, and their olympic judges, the magazine critics, who continue to debate and promulgate oracles about poetry, as if it were still what it was in the Homeric age, the all-in-all of intellectual progression, and as if there were no such things in existence as mathematicians, astronomers, chemists, moralists, metaphysicians, historians, politicians, and political economists, who have built into the upper air of intelligence a pyramid, from the summit of which they see the modern Parnassus far beneath them, and, knowing how small a place it occupies in the comprehensiveness of their prospect, smile at the little ambition and the circumscribed perceptions with which the drivellers and mountebanks upon it are contending for the poetical palm and the critical chair.



A DEFENCE OF POETRY

BY PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY





## A DEFENCE OF POETRY.

### PART I.

ACCORDING to one mode of regarding those two classes of mental action, which are called reason and imagination, the former may be considered as mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced; and the latter, as mind acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light, and composing from them as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity. The one is the τὸ ποιεῖν, or the principle of synthesis, and has for its object those forms which are common to universal nature and existence itself; the other is the τὸ λογίζειν, or principle of analysis, and its action regards the relations of things, simply as relations; considering thoughts, not in their integral unity, but as the algebraical representations which conduct to certain general results. Reason is the enumeration of quantities already known; imagination is the perception of the value of those quantities, both separately and as a whole. Reason respects the differences, and imagination the similitudes of things. Reason is to imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance.

Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be "the expression of the imagination:" and poetry is connate with the origin of man. Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Æolian lyre, which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody.

But there is a principle within the human being, and perhaps within all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than in a lyre, and produces not melody alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds and motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them. It is as if the lyre could accommodate its chords to the motions of that which strikes them, in a determined proportion of sound ; even as the musician can accommodate his voice to the sound of the lyre. A child at play by itself will express its delight by its voice and motions ; and every inflexion of tone and gesture will bear exact relation to a corresponding antitype in the pleasurable impressions which awakened it ; it will be the reflected image of that impression ; and as the lyre trembles and sounds after the wind has died away, so the child seeks, by prolonging in its voice and motions the duration of the effect, to prolong also a consciousness of the cause. In relation to the objects which delight a child, these expressions are what poetry is to higher objects. The savage (for the savage is to ages what the child is to years) expresses the emotions produced in him by surrounding objects in a similar manner ; and language and gesture, together with plastic or pictorial imitation, become the image of the combined effect of those objects and his apprehension of them. Man in society, with all his passions and his pleasures, next becomes the object of the passions and pleasures of man ; an additional class of emotions produces an augmented treasure of expression ; and language, gesture, and the imitative arts, become at once the representation and the medium, the pencil and the picture, the chisel and the statue, the chord and the harmony. The social sympathies, or those laws from which as from its elements society results, begin to develop themselves from the moment that two human beings coexist ; the future is contained within the present as the plant within the seed ; and equality, diversity, unity, contrast, mutual dependence,

become the principles alone capable of affording the motives according to which the will of a social being is determined to action, inasmuch as he is social; and constitute pleasure in sensation, virtue in sentiment, beauty in art, truth in reasoning, and love in the intercourse of kind. Hence men, even in the infancy of society, observe a certain order in their words and actions, distinct from that of the objects and the impressions represented by them, all expression being subject to the laws of that from which it proceeds. But let us dismiss those more general considerations which might involve an inquiry into the principles of society itself, and restrict our view to the manner in which the imagination is expressed upon its forms.

In the youth of the world, men dance and sing and imitate natural objects, observing in these actions, as in all others, a certain rhythm or order. And, although all men observe a similar, they observe not the same order, in the motions of the dance, in the melody of the song, in the combinations of language, in the series of their imitations of natural objects. For there is a certain order or rhythm belonging to each of these classes of mimetic representation, from which the hearer and the spectator receive an intenser and purer pleasure than from any other: the sense of an approximation to this order has been called taste by modern writers. Every man in the infancy of art, observes an order which approximates more or less closely to that from which this highest delight results: but the diversity is not sufficiently marked, as that its gradations should be sensible, except in those instances where the predominance of this faculty of approximation to the beautiful (for so we may be permitted to name the relation between this highest pleasure and its cause) is very great. Those in whom it exists to excess are poets, in the most universal sense of the word; and the pleasure resulting from the manner in which they

express the influence of society or nature upon their own minds, communicates itself to others, and gathers a sort of reduplication from the community. Their language is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehension, until words, which represent them, become, through time, signs for portions or classes of thought, instead of pictures of integral thoughts; and then, if no new poets should arise to create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganised, language will be dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse. These similitudes or relations are finely said by Lord Bacon to be "the same footsteps of nature impressed upon the various subjects of the world\*"—and he considers the faculty which perceives them as the storehouse of axioms common to all knowledge. In the infancy of society every author is necessarily a poet, because language itself is poetry; and to be a poet is to apprehend the true and the beautiful, in a word, the good which exists in the relation, subsisting, first, between existence and perception, and secondly between perception and expression. Every original language near to its source is in itself the chaos of a cyclic poem: the copiousness of lexicography and the distinctions of grammar are the works of a later age, and are merely the catalogue and the form of the creations of poetry.

But poets, or those who imagine and express this indestructible order, are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance, and architecture, and statuary, and painting; they are the institutors of laws and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true, that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion. Hence all original religions are alle-

\* |De Augment. Scient., cap. 1, lib. iii.

gorical or susceptible of allegory, and, like Janus, have a double face of false and true. Poets, according to the circumstances of the age and nation in which they appeared, were called, in the earlier epochs of the world, legislators or prophets : a poet essentially comprises and unites both these characters. For he not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time. Not that I assert poets to be prophets in the gross sense of the word, or that they can foretell the form as surely as they foreknow the spirit of events : such is the pretence of superstition, which would make poetry an attribute of prophecy, rather than prophecy an attribute of poetry. A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one ; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not. The grammatical forms which express the moods of time, and the difference of persons, and the distinction of place, are convertible with respect to the highest poetry without injuring it as poetry ; and the choruses of Æschylus, and the book of Job, and Dante's Paradise, would afford, more than any other writings, examples of this fact, if the limits of this essay did not forbid citation. The creations of sculpture, painting, and music, are illustrations still more decisive.

Language, colour, form, and religious and civil habits of action, are all the instruments and materials of poetry ; they may be called poetry by that figure of speech which considers the effect as a synonyme of the cause. But poetry in a more restricted sense expresses those arrangements of language, and especially metrical language, which are created by that imperial faculty, whose throne is curtained within the invisible nature of man. And this springs from the nature itself of language, which is a more direct representation of the actions and passions



of our internal being, and is susceptible of more various and delicate combinations, than colour, form, or motion, and is more plastic and obedient to the control of that faculty of which it is the creation. For language is arbitrarily produced by the imagination, and has relation to thoughts alone; but all other materials, instruments, and conditions of art, have relations among each other, which limit and interpose between conception and expression. The former is as a mirror which reflects, the latter as a cloud which enfeebles, the light of which both are mediums of communication. Hence the fame of sculptors, painters, and musicians, although the intrinsic powers of the great masters of these arts may yield in no degree to that of those who have employed language as the hieroglyphic of their thoughts, has never equalled that of poets in the restricted sense of the term; as two performers of equal skill will produce unequal effects from a guitar and a harp. The fame of legislators and founders of religion, so long as their institutions last, alone seems to exceed that of poets in the restricted sense; but it can scarcely be a question, whether, if we deduct the celebrity which their flattery of the gross opinions of the vulgar usually conciliates, together with that which belonged to them in their higher character of poets, any excess will remain.

We have thus circumscribed the word poetry within the limits of that art which is the most familiar and the most perfect expression of the faculty itself. It is necessary, however, to make the circle still narrower, and to determine the distinction between measured and unmeasured language; for the popular division into prose and verse is inadmissible in accurate philosophy.

Sounds as well as thoughts have relation both between each other and towards that which they represent, and a perception of the order of those relations has always been found connected with a perception of the order of the re-



lations of thought. Hence the language of poets has ever affected a certain uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound, without which it were not poetry, and which is scarcely less indispensable to the communication of its influence, than the words themselves, without reference to that peculiar order. Hence the vanity of translation; it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet. The plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower—and this is the burthen of the curse of Babel.

An observation of the regular mode of the recurrence of harmony in the language of poetical minds, together with its relation to music, produced metre, or a certain system of traditional forms of harmony and language. Yet it is by no means essential that a poet should accommodate his language to this traditional form, so that the harmony, which is its spirit, be observed. The practice is indeed convenient and popular, and to be preferred, especially in such composition as includes much action: but every great poet must inevitably innovate upon the example of his predecessors in the exact structure of his peculiar versification. The distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error. The distinction between philosophers and poets has been anticipated. Plato was essentially a poet—the truth and splendour of his imagery, and the melody of his language, are the most intense that it is possible to conceive. He rejected the measure of the epic, dramatic, and lyrical forms, because he sought to kindle a harmony in thoughts divested of shape and action, and he forbore to invent any regular plan of rhythm which would include, under determinate forms, the varied pauses of his style. Cicero sought to imitate the cadence of his periods, but with little success. Lord Bacon was a poet\*. His language

\* See the *Filum Labyrinthi*, and the *Essay on Death* particularly.

has a sweet and majestic rhythm, which satisfies the sense, no less than the almost superhuman wisdom of his philosophy satisfies the intellect ; it is a strain which distends, and then bursts the circumference of the reader's mind, and pours itself forth together with it into the universal element with which it has perpetual sympathy. All the authors of revolutions in opinion are not only necessarily poets as they are inventors, nor even as their words unveil the permanent analogy of things by images which participate in the life of truth ; but as their periods are harmonious and rhythmical, and contain in themselves the elements of verse ; being the echo of the eternal music. Nor are those supreme poets, who have employed traditional forms of rhythm on account of the form and action of their subjects, less capable of perceiving and teaching the truth of things, than those who have omitted that form. Shakespeare, Dante, and Milton (to confine ourselves to modern writers) are philosophers of the very loftiest power.

A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth. There is this difference between a story and a poem, that a story is a catalogue of detached facts, which have no other connexion than time, place, circumstance, cause, and effect ; the other is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the Creator, which is itself the image of all other minds. The one is partial, and applies only to a definite period of time, and a certain combination of events which can never again recur ; the other is universal, and contains within itself the germ of a relation to whatever motives or actions have place in the possible varieties of human nature. Time, which destroys the beauty and the use of the story of particular facts, stripped of the poetry which should invest them, augments that of poetry, and for ever develops new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth which it contains. Hence epitomes have been called the moths of just history ; they eat out the

poetry of it. A story of particular facts is as a mirror which obscures and distorts that which should be beautiful : poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted.

The parts of a composition may be poetical, without the composition as a whole being a poem. A single sentence may be considered as a whole, though it may be found in the midst of a series of unassimilated portions ; a single word even may be a spark of inextinguishable thought. And thus all the great historians, Herodotus, Plutarch, Livy, were poets ; and although the plan of these writers, especially that of Livy, restrained them from developing this faculty in its highest degree, they made copious and ample amends for their subjection, by filling all the interstices of their subjects with living images.

Having determined what is poetry, and who are poets, let us proceed to estimate its effects upon society.

Poetry is ever accompanied with pleasure : all spirits upon which it falls open themselves to receive the wisdom which is mingled with its delight. In the infancy of the world, neither poets themselves nor their auditors are fully aware of the excellence of poetry : for it acts in a divine and unapprehended manner, beyond and above consciousness ; and it is reserved for future generations to contemplate and measure the mighty cause and effect in all the strength and splendour of their union. Even in modern times, no living poet ever arrived at the fullness of his fame ; the jury which sits in judgment upon a poet, belonging as he does to all time, must be composed of his peers : it must be empanelled by time from the selectest of the wise of many generations. A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds ; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why. The poems of Homer and his contemporaries were the

delight of infant Greece ; they were the elements of that social system which is the column upon which all succeeding civilisation has reposed. Homer embodied the ideal perfection of his age in human character ; nor can we doubt that those who read his verses were awakened to an ambition of becoming like to Achilles, Hector, and Ulysses : the truth and beauty of friendship, patriotism, and persevering devotion to an object, were unveiled to their depths in these immortal creations : the sentiments of the auditors must have been refined and enlarged by a sympathy with such great and lovely impersonations, until from admiring they imitated, and from imitation they identified themselves with the objects of their admiration. Nor let it be objected, that these characters are remote from moral perfection, and that they are by no means to be considered as edifying patterns for general imitation. Every epoch, under names more or less specious, has deified its peculiar errors ; Revenge is the naked idol of the worship of a semibarbarous age ; and Self-deceit is the veiled image of unknown evil, before which luxury and satiety lie prostrate. But a poet considers the vices of his contemporaries as the temporary dress in which his creations must be arrayed, and which cover without concealing the eternal proportions of their beauty. An epic or dramatic personage is understood to wear them around his soul, as he may the ancient armour or modern uniform around his body ; whilst it is easy to conceive a dress more graceful than either. The beauty of the internal nature cannot be so far concealed by its accidental vesture, but that the spirit of its form shall communicate itself to the very disguise, and indicate the shape it hides from the manner in which it is worn. A majestic form and graceful motions will express themselves through the most barbarous and tasteless costume. Few poets of the highest class have chosen to exhibit the beauty of their conceptions in its naked truth and splendour ; and it is doubtful

whether the alloy of costume, habit, &c., be not necessary to temper this planetary music for mortal ears.

The whole objection, however, of the immorality of poetry rests upon a misconception of the manner in which poetry acts to produce the moral improvement of man. Ethical science arranges the elements which poetry has created, and propounds schemes and proposes examples of civil and domestic life: nor is it for want of admirable doctrines that men hate, and despise, and censure, and deceive, and subjugate one another. But poetry acts in another and diviner manner. It awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar; it reproduces all that it represents, and the impersonations clothed in its Elysian light stand thenceforward in the minds of those who have once contemplated them, as memorials of that gentle and exalted content which extends itself over all thoughts and actions with which it coexists. The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void for ever craves fresh food. Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb. A



poet therefore would do ill to embody his own conceptions of right and wrong, which are usually those of his place and time, in his poetical creations, which participate in neither. By this assumption of the inferior office of interpreting the effect, in which perhaps after all he might acquit himself but imperfectly, he would resign a glory in the participation of the cause. There was little danger that Homer, or any of the eternal poets, should have so far misunderstood themselves as to have abdicated this throne of their widest dominion. Those in whom the poetical faculty, though great, is less intense, as Euripides, Lucan, Tasso, Spenser, have frequently affected a moral aim, and the effect of their poetry is diminished in exact proportion to the degree in which they compel us to advert to this purpose.

Homer and the cyclic poets were followed at a certain interval by the dramatic and lyrical poets of Athens, who flourished contemporaneously with all that is most perfect in the kindred expressions of the poetical faculty ; architecture, painting, music, the dance, sculpture, philosophy, and we may add, the forms of civil life. For although the scheme of Athenian society was deformed by many imperfections which the poetry existing in chivalry and Christianity has erased from the habits and institutions of modern Europe ; yet never at any other period has so much energy, beauty and virtue, been developed ; never was blind strength and stubborn form so disciplined and rendered subject to the will of man, or that will less repugnant to the dictates of the beautiful and the true, as during the century which preceded the death of Socrates. Of no other epoch in the history of our species have we records and fragments stamped so visibly with the image of the divinity in man. But it is poetry alone, in form, in action, and in language, which has rendered this epoch memorable above all others, and the storehouse of examples to everlasting time. For written poetry existed at that epoch



simultaneously with the other arts, and it is an idle inquiry to demand which gave and which received the light, which all, as from a common focus, have scattered over the darkest periods of succeeding time. We know no more of cause and effect than a constant conjunction of events: poetry is ever found to coexist with whatever other arts contribute to the happiness and perfection of man. I appeal to what has already been established to distinguish between the cause and the effect.

It was at the period here adverted to, that the drama had its birth; and however a succeeding writer may have equalled or surpassed those few great specimens of the Athenian drama which have been preserved to us, it is indisputable that the art itself never was understood or practised according to the true philosophy of it, as at Athens. For the Athenians employed language, action, music, painting, the dance, and religious institutions, to produce a common effect in the representation of the highest idealisms of passion and of power; each division in the art was made perfect in its kind by artists of the most consummate skill, and was disciplined into a beautiful proportion and unity one towards the other. On the modern stage a few only of the elements capable of expressing the image of the poet's conception are employed at once. We have tragedy without music and dancing; and music and dancing without the highest impersonations of which they are the fit accompaniment, and both without religion and solemnity. Religious institution has indeed been usually banished from the stage. Our system of divesting the actor's face of a mask, on which the many expressions appropriated to his dramatic character might be moulded into one permanent and unchanging expression, is favourable only to a partial and inharmonious effect; it is fit for nothing but a monologue, where all the attention may be directed to some great master of ideal mimicry. The modern practice of blending comedy with tragedy, though

liable to great abuse in point of practice, is undoubtedly an extension of the dramatic circle ; but the comedy should be as in *King Lear*, universal, ideal, and sublime. It is perhaps the intervention of this principle which determines the balance in favour of *King Lear* against the *Œdipus Tyrannus* or the *Agamemnon*, or, if you will, the trilogies with which they are connected ; unless the intense power of the choral poetry, especially that of the latter, should be considered as restoring the equilibrium. *King Lear*, if it can sustain this comparison, may be judged to be the most perfect specimen of the dramatic art existing in the world ; in spite of the narrow conditions to which the poet was subjected by the ignorance of the philosophy of the drama which has prevailed in modern Europe. Calderon, in his religious Autos, has attempted to fulfil some of the high conditions of dramatic representation neglected by Shakspeare ; such as the establishing a relation between the drama and religion, and the accommodating them to music and dancing ; but he omits the observation of conditions still more important, and more is lost than gained by the substitution of the rigidly-defined and ever-repeated idealisms of a distorted superstition for the living impersonations of the truth of human passions.

But I digress.—The connexion of scenic exhibitions with the improvement or corruption of the manners of men, has been universally recognised : in other words, the presence or absence of poetry in its most perfect and universal form, has been found to be connected with good and evil in conduct or habit. The corruption which has been imputed to the drama as an effect, begins, when the poetry employed in its constitution ends : I appeal to the history of manners whether the periods of the growth of the one and the decline of the other have not corresponded with an exactness equal to any example of moral cause and effect.

The drama at Athens, or wheresoever else it may have approached to its perfection, ever coexisted with the moral

and intellectual greatness of the age. The tragedies of the Athenian poets are as mirrors in which the spectator beholds himself, under a thin disguise of circumstance, stript of all but that ideal perfection and energy which every one feels to be the internal type of all that he loves, admires, and would become. The imagination is enlarged by a sympathy with pains and passions so mighty, that they distend in their conception the capacity of that by which they are conceived, the good affections are strengthened by pity, indignation, terror and sorrow ; and an exalted calm is prolonged from the satiety of this high exercise of them into the tumult of familiar life : even crime is disarmed of half its horror and all its contagion by being represented as the fatal consequence of the unfathomable agencies of nature ; error is thus divested of its wilfulness ; men can no longer cherish it as the creation of their choice. In the drama of the highest order there is little food for censure or hatred ; it teaches rather self-knowledge and self-respect. Neither the eye nor the mind can see itself, unless reflected upon that which it resembles. The drama, so long as it continues to express poetry, is a prismatic and many-sided mirror, which collects the brightest rays of human nature and divides and reproduces them from the simplicity of these elementary forms, and touches them with majesty and beauty, and multiplies all that it reflects, and endows it with the power of propagating its like wherever it may fall.

But in periods of the decay of social life, the drama sympathises with that decay. Tragedy becomes a cold imitation of the form of the great masterpieces of antiquity, divested of all harmonious accompaniment of the kindred arts ; and often the very form misunderstood, or a weak attempt to teach certain doctrines, which the writer considers as moral truths ; and which are usually no more than specious flatteries of some gross vice or weakness, with which the author, in common with his auditors,

are infected. Hence what has been called the classical and domestic drama. Addison's "Cato" is a specimen of the one; and would it were not superfluous to cite examples of the other! To such purposes poetry cannot be made subservient. Poetry is a sword of lightning, ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it. And thus we observe that all dramatic writings of this nature are unimaginative in a singular degree; they affect sentiment and passion, which, divested of imagination, are other names for caprice and appetite. The period in our own history of the grossest degradation of the drama is the reign of Charles II., when all forms in which poetry had been accustomed to be expressed became hymns to the triumph of kingly power over liberty and virtue. Milton stood alone illuminating an age unworthy of him. At such periods the calculating principle pervades all the forms of dramatic exhibition, and poetry ceases to be expressed upon them. Comedy loses its ideal universality: wit succeeds to humour; we laugh from self-complacency and triumph, instead of pleasure; malignity, sarcasm, and contempt, succeed to sympathetic merriment; we hardly laugh, but we smile. Obscenity, which is ever blasphemy against the divine beauty in life, becomes, from the very veil which it assumes, more active if less disgusting: it is a monster for which the corruption of society for ever brings forth new food, which it devours in secret.

The drama being that form under which a greater number of modes of expression of poetry are susceptible of being combined than any other, the connexion of poetry and social good is more observable in the drama than in whatever other form. And it is indisputable that the highest perfection of human society has ever corresponded with the highest dramatic excellence; and that the corruption or the extinction of the drama in a nation where it has once flourished, is a mark of a corruption of manners, and an extinction of the energies which sustain the soul of

social life. But, as Machiavelli says of political institutions, that life may be preserved and renewed, if men should arise capable of bringing back the drama to its principles. And this is true with respect to poetry in its most extended sense : all language, institution and form, require not only to be produced but to be sustained : the office and character of a poet participates in the divine nature as regards providence, no less than as regards creation.

Civil war, the spoils of Asia, and the fatal predominance first of the Macedonian, and then of the Roman arms, were so many symbols of the extinction or suspension of the creative faculty in Greece. The bucolic writers, who found patronage under the lettered tyrants of Sicily and Egypt, were the latest representatives of its most glorious reign. Their poetry is intensely melodious ; like the odour of the tuberoses, it overcomes and sickens the spirit with excess of sweetness ; whilst the poetry of the preceding age was as a meadow-gale of June, which mingles the fragrance of all the flowers of the field, and adds a quickening and harmonising spirit of its own which endows the sense with a power of sustaining its extreme delight. The bucolic and erotic delicacy in written poetry is correlative with that softness in statuary, music, and the kindred arts, and even in manners and institutions, which distinguished the epoch to which I now refer. Nor is it the poetical faculty itself, or any misapplication of it, to which this want of harmony is to be imputed. An equal sensibility to the influence of the senses and the affections is to be found in the writings of Homer and Sophocles : the former, especially, has clothed sensual and pathetic images with irresistible attractions. The superiority in these to succeeding writers consists in the presence of those thoughts which belong to the inner faculties of our nature, not in the absence of those which are connected with the external : their incomparable perfection consists in a harmony of the union of all. It is not what the erotic poets



have, but what they have not, in which their imperfection consists. It is not inasmuch as they were poets, but inasmuch as they were not poets, that they can be considered with any plausibility as connected with the corruption of their age. Had that corruption availed so as to extinguish in them the sensibility to pleasure, passion, and natural scenery, which is imputed to them as an imperfection, the last triumph of evil would have been achieved. For the end of social corruption is to destroy all sensibility to pleasure; and, therefore, it is corruption. It begins at the imagination and the intellect as at the core, and distributes itself thence as a paralysing venom, through the affections into the very appetites, until all become a torpid mass in which hardly sense survives. At the approach of such a period, poetry ever addresses itself to those faculties which are the last to be destroyed, and its voice is heard, like the footsteps of Astræa, departing from the world. Poetry ever communicates all the pleasure which men are capable of receiving: it is ever still the light of life; the source of whatever of beautiful or generous or true can have place in an evil time. It will readily be confessed that those among the luxurious citizens of Syracuse and Alexandria, who were delighted with the poems of Theocritus, were less cold, cruel, and sensual than the remnant of their tribe. But corruption must utterly have destroyed the fabric of human society before poetry can ever cease. The sacred links of that chain have never been entirely disjoined, which descending through the minds of many men is attached to those great minds, whence as from a magnet the invisible effluence is sent forth, which at once connects, animates, and sustains the life of all. It is the faculty which contains within itself the seeds at once of its own and of social renovation. And let us not circumscribe the effects of the bucolic and erotic poetry within the limits of the sensibility of those to whom it was addressed. They may have perceived



the beauty of those immortal compositions, simply as fragments and isolated portions: those who are more finely organised, or born in a happier age, may recognise them as episodes to that great poem, which all poets, like the co-operating thoughts of one great mind, have built up since the beginning of the world.

The same revolutions within a narrower sphere had place in ancient Rome; but the actions and forms of its social life never seem to have been perfectly saturated with the poetical element. The Romans appear to have considered the Greeks as the selectest treasuries of the selectest forms of manners and of nature, and to have abstained from creating in measured language, sculpture, music, or architecture, any thing which might bear a particular relation to their own condition, whilst it should bear a general one to the universal constitution of the world. But we judge from partial evidence, and we judge perhaps partially. Ennius, Varro, Pacuvius, and Accius, all great poets, have been lost. Lucretius is in the highest, and Virgil in a very high sense, a creator. The chosen delicacy of expressions of the latter, are as a mist of light which conceal from us the intense and exceeding truth of his conceptions of nature. Livy is instinct with poetry. Yet Horace, Catullus, Ovid, and generally the other great writers of the Virgilian age, saw man and nature in the mirror of Greece. The institutions also, and the religion of Rome, were less poetical than those of Greece, as the shadow is less vivid than the substance. Hence poetry in Rome, seemed to follow, rather than accompany, the perfection of political and domestic society. The true poetry of Rome lived in its institutions; for whatever of beautiful, true, and majestic, they contained, could have sprung only from the faculty which creates the order in which they consist. The life of Camillus, the death of Regulus; the expectation of the senators, in their godlike state, of the victorious Gauls; the refusal of the republic

to make peace with Hannibal, after the battle of Cannæ, were not the consequences of a refined calculation of the probable personal advantage to result from such a rhythm and order in the shows of life, to those who were at once the poets and the actors of these immortal dramas. The imagination beholding the beauty of this order, created it out of itself according to its own idea ; the consequence was empire, and the reward everlasting fame. These things are not the less poetry, *quia carent vate sacro*. They are the episodes of that cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of men. The Past, like an inspired rhapsodist, fills the theatre of everlasting generations with their harmony.

At length the ancient system of religion and manners had fulfilled the circle of its evolutions. And the world would have fallen into utter anarchy and darkness, but that there were found poets among the authors of the Christian and chivalric systems of manners and religion, who created forms of opinion and action never before conceived ; which, copied into the imaginations of men, became as generals to the bewildered armies of their thoughts. It is foreign to the present purpose to touch upon the evil produced by these systems : except that we protest, on the ground of the principles already established, that no portion of it can be attributed to the poetry they contain.

It is probable that the poetry of Moses, Job, David, Solomon, and Isaiah, had produced a great effect upon the mind of Jesus and his disciples. The scattered fragments preserved to us by the biographers of this extraordinary person, are all instinct with the most vivid poetry. But his doctrines seem to have been quickly distorted. At a certain period after the prevalence of a system of opinions founded upon those promulgated by him, the three forms into which Plato had distributed the faculties of mind underwent a sort of apotheosis, and became the object

of the worship of the civilised world. Here it is to be confessed that "Light seems to thicken," and

"The crow makes wing to the rooky wood,  
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,  
And night's black agents to their preys do rouse."

But mark how beautiful an order has sprung from the dust and blood of this fierce chaos! how the world, as from a resurrection, balancing itself on the golden wings of knowledge and of hope, has reassumed its yet unwearied flight into the heaven of time. Listen to the music, unheard by outward ears, which is as a ceaseless and invisible wind, nourishing its everlasting course with strength and swiftness.

The poetry in the doctrines of Jesus Christ, and the mythology and institutions of the Celtic conquerors of the Roman Empire, outlived the darkness and the convulsions connected with their growth and victory, and blended themselves in a new fabric of manners and opinion. It is an error to impute the ignorance of the dark ages to the Christian doctrines or the predominance of the Celtic nations. Whatever of evil their agencies may have contained sprang from the extinction of the poetical principle, connected with the progress of despotism and superstition. Men, from causes too intricate to be here discussed, had become insensible and selfish: their own will had become feeble, and yet they were its slaves, and thence the slaves of the will of others: but fear, avarice, cruelty, and fraud, characterised a race amongst whom no one was to be found capable of *creating* in form, language, or institution. The moral anomalies of such a state of society are not justly to be charged upon any class of events immediately connected with them, and those events are most entitled to our approbation which could dissolve it most expeditiously. It is unfortunate for those who cannot distinguish words from thoughts, that many of

these anomalies have been incorporated into our popular religion.

It was not until the eleventh century that the effects of the poetry of the Christian and chivalric systems began to manifest themselves. The principle of equality had been discovered and applied by Plato in his Republic, as the theoretical rule of the mode in which the materials of pleasure and of power produced by the common skill and labour of human beings ought to be distributed among them. The limitations of this rule were asserted by him to be determined only by the sensibility of each, or the utility to result to all. Plato, following the doctrines of Timæus and Pythagoras, taught also a moral and intellectual system of doctrine, comprehending at once the past, the present, and the future condition of man. Jesus Christ divulged the sacred and eternal truths contained in these views to mankind, and Christianity, in its abstract purity, became the exoteric expression of the esoteric doctrines of the poetry and wisdom of antiquity. The incorporation of the Celtic nations with the exhausted population of the south, impressed upon it the figure of the poetry existing in their mythology and institutions. The result was a sum of the action and reaction of all the causes included in it ; for it may be assumed as a maxim that no nation or religion can supersede any other without incorporating into itself a portion of that which it supersedes. The abolition of personal and domestic slavery, and the emancipation of women from a great part of the degrading restraints of antiquity, were among the consequences of these events.

The abolition of personal slavery is the basis of the highest political hope that it can enter into the mind of man to conceive. The freedom of women produced the poetry of sexual love. Love became a religion, the idols of whose worship were ever present. It was as if the statues of Apollo and the Muses had been endowed with

life and motion, and had walked forth among their worshippers ; so that earth became peopled by the inhabitants of a diviner world. The familiar appearance and proceedings of life became wonderful and heavenly, and a paradise was created as out of the wrecks of Eden. And as this creation itself is poetry, so its creators were poets ; and language was the instrument of their art : “ Galeotto fù il libro, e chi lo scrisse.” The Provençal Trouveurs, or inventors, preceded Petrarch, whose verses are as spells, which unseal the inmost enchanted fountains of the delight which is in the grief of love. It is impossible to feel them without becoming a portion of that beauty which we contemplate : it were superfluous to explain how the gentleness and elevation of mind connected with these sacred emotions can render men more amiable, more generous and wise, and lift them out of the dull vapours of the little world of self. Dante understood the secret things of love even more than Petrarch. His *Vita Nuova* is an inexhaustible fountain of purity of sentiment and language : it is the idealised history of that period, and those intervals of his life which were dedicated to love. His apotheosis of Beatrice in Paradise, and the gradations of his own love and her loveliness, by which as by steps he feigns himself to have ascended to the throne of the Supreme Cause, is the most glorious imagination of modern poetry. The acutest critics have justly reversed the judgment of the vulgar, and the order of the great acts of the “ Divine Drama,” in the measure of the admiration which they accord to the Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. The latter is a perpetual hymn of everlasting love. Love, which found a worthy poet in Plato alone of all the ancients, has been celebrated by a chorus of the greatest writers of the renovated world ; and the music has penetrated the caverns of society, and its echoes still drown the dissonance of arms and superstition. At successive intervals, Ariosto, Tasso, Shak-



speare, Spenser, Calderon, Rousseau, and the great writers of our own age, have celebrated the dominion of love, planting as it were trophies in the human mind of that sublimest victory over sensuality and force. The true relation borne to each other by the sexes into which human kind is distributed, has become less misunderstood ; and if the error which confounded diversity with inequality of the powers of the two sexes has been partially recognised in the opinions and institutions of modern Europe, we owe this great benefit to the worship of which chivalry was the law, and poets the prophets.

The poetry of Dante may be considered as the bridge thrown over the stream of time, which unites the modern and ancient world. The distorted notions of invisible things which Dante and his rival Milton have idealised, are merely the mask and the mantle in which these great poets walk through eternity enveloped and disguised. It is a difficult question to determine how far they were conscious of the distinction which must have subsisted in their minds between their own creeds and that of the people. Dante at least appears to wish to mark the full extent of it by placing Riphæus, whom Virgil calls *justissimus unus*, in Paradise, and observing a most heretical caprice in his distribution of rewards and punishments. And Milton's poem contains within itself a philosophical refutation of that system of which, by a strange and natural antithesis, it has been a chief popular support. Nothing can exceed the energy and magnificence of the character of Satan as expressed in "Paradise Lost." It is a mistake to suppose that he could ever have been intended for the popular personification of evil. Implacable hate, patient cunning, and a sleepless refinement of device to inflict the extremest anguish on an enemy, these things are evil ; and, although venial in a slave, are not to be forgiven in a tyrant ; although redeemed by much that ennobles his defeat in one subdued, are



marked by all that dishonours his conquest in the victor. Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God, as one who perseveres in some purpose which he has conceived to be excellent in spite of adversity and torture, is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy, not from any mistaken notion of inducing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments. Milton has so far violated the popular creed (if this shall be judged to be a violation) as to have alleged no superiority of moral virtue to his god over his devil. And this bold neglect of a direct moral purpose is the most decisive proof of the supremacy of Milton's genius. He mingled as it were the elements of human nature as colours upon a single pallet, and arranged them in the composition of his great picture according to the laws of epic truth, that is, according to the laws of that principle by which a series of actions of the external universe and of intelligent and ethical beings is calculated to excite the sympathy of succeeding generations of mankind. The *Divina Commedia* and *Paradise Lost* have conferred upon modern mythology a systematic form; and when change and time shall have added one more superstition to the mass of those which have arisen and decayed upon the earth, commentators will be learnedly employed in elucidating the religion of ancestral Europe, only not utterly forgotten because it will have been stamped with the eternity of genius.

Homer was the first and Dante the second epic poet: that is, the second poet, the series of whose creations bore a defined and intelligible relation to the knowledge and sentiment and religion of the age in which he lived, and of the ages which followed it: developing itself in correspondence with their development. For Lucretius had limed the wings of his swift spirit in the dregs of the sensible world; and Virgil, with a modesty that ill became his

genius, had affected the fame of an imitator, even whilst he created anew all that he copied ; and none among the flock of mock-birds, though their notes are sweet, Apollonius Rhodius, Quintus Calaber Smyrnæus, Nonnus, Lucan, Statius, or Claudian, have sought even to fulfil a single condition of epic truth. Milton was the third epic poet. For if the title of epic in its highest sense be refused to the *Æneid*, still less can it be conceded to the Orlando Furioso, the *Gerusalemme Liberata*, the *Lusiad*, or the *Fairy Queen*.

Dante and Milton were both deeply penetrated with the ancient religion of the civilised world ; and its spirit exists in their poetry probably in the same proportion as its forms survived in the unreformed worship of modern Europe. The one preceded and the other followed the Reformation at almost equal intervals. Dante was the first religious reformer, and Luther surpassed him rather in the rudeness and acrimony, than in the boldness of his censures, of papal usurpation. Dante was the first awakener of entranced Europe ; he created a language, in itself music and persuasion, out of a chaos of inharmonious barbarisms. He was the congregator of those great spirits who presided over the resurrection of learning ; the Lucifer of that starry flock which in the thirteenth century shone forth from republican Italy, as from a heaven, into the darkness of the benighted world. His very words are instinct with spirit ; each is as a spark, a burning atom of inextinguishable thought ; and many yet lie covered in the ashes of their birth, and pregnant with a lightning which has yet found no conductor. All high poetry is infinite ; it is as the first acorn, which contained all oaks potentially. Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed. A great poem is a fountain for ever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight ; and after one person and one age has exhausted all its divine effluence which

their peculiar relations enable them to share, another and yet another succeeds, and new relations are ever developed, the source of an unforeseen and an unconceived delight.

The age immediately succeeding to that of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, was characterised by a revival of painting, sculpture, and architecture. Chaucer caught the sacred inspiration, and the superstructure of English literature is based upon the materials of Italian invention.

But let us not be betrayed from a defence into a critical history of poetry and its influence on society. Be it enough to have pointed out the effects of poets, in the large and true sense of the word, upon their own and all succeeding times.

But poets have been challenged to resign the civic crown to reasoners and mechanists, on another plea. It is admitted that the exercise of the imagination is most delightful, but it is alleged that that of reason is more useful. Let us examine, as the grounds of this distinction, what is here meant by utility. Pleasure or good, in a general sense, is that which the consciousness of a sensitive and intelligent being seeks, and in which, when found, it acquiesces. There are two kinds of pleasure, one durable, universal and permanent; the other transitory and particular. Utility may either express the means of producing the former or the latter. In the former sense, whatever strengthens and purifies the affections, enlarges the imagination, and adds spirit to sense, is useful. But a narrower meaning may be assigned to the word utility, confining it to express that which banishes the importunity of the wants of our animal nature, the surrounding men with security of life, the dispersing the grosser delusions of superstition, and the conciliating such a degree of mutual forbearance among men as may consist with the motives of personal advantage.

Undoubtedly the promoters of utility, in this limited sense, have their appointed office in society. They follow

the footsteps of poets, and copy the sketches of their creations into the book of common life. They make space, and give time. Their exertions are of the highest value, so long as they confine their administration of the concerns of the inferior powers of our nature within the limits due to the superior ones. But while the sceptic destroys gross superstitions, let him spare to deface, as some of the French writers have defaced, the eternal truths charactered upon the imaginations of men. Whilst the mechanist abridges, and the political economist combines, labour, let them beware that their speculations, for want of correspondence with those first principles which belong to the imagination, do not tend, as they have in modern England, to exasperate at once the extremes of luxury and want. They have exemplified the saying, "To him that hath, more shall be given; and from him that hath not, the little that he hath shall be taken away." The rich have become richer, and the poor have become poorer; and the vessel of the state is driven between the Scylla and Charybdis of anarchy and despotism. Such are the effects which must ever flow from an unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty.

It is difficult to define pleasure in its highest sense; the definition involving a number of apparent paradoxes. For, from an inexplicable defect of harmony in the constitution of human nature, the pain of the inferior is frequently connected with the pleasures of the superior portions of our being. Sorrow, terror, anguish, despair itself, are often the chosen expressions of an approximation to the highest good. Our sympathy in tragic fiction depends on this principle; tragedy delights by affording a shadow of that pleasure which exists in pain. This is the source also of the melancholy which is inseparable from the sweetest melody. The pleasure that is in sorrow is sweeter than the pleasure of pleasure itself. And hence the saying, "It is better to go to the house of mourning

than to the house of mirth." Not that this highest species of pleasure is necessarily linked with pain. The delight of love and friendship, the ecstasy of the admiration of nature, the joy of the perception and still more of the creation of poetry, is often wholly unalloyed.

The production and assurance of pleasure in this highest sense is true utility. Those who produce and preserve this pleasure are poets or poetical philosophers.

The exertions of Locke, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, Rousseau\*, and their disciples, in favour of oppressed and deluded humanity, are entitled to the gratitude of mankind. Yet it is easy to calculate the degree of moral and intellectual improvement which the world would have exhibited, had they never lived. A little more nonsense would have been talked for a century or two ; and perhaps a few more men, women, and children, burnt as heretics, We might not at this moment have been congratulating each other on the abolition of the Inquisition in Spain. But it exceeds all imagination to conceive what would have been the moral condition of the world if neither Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Shakspeare, Calderon, Lord Bacon, nor Milton, had ever existed ; if Raphael and Michael Angelo had never been born ; if the Hebrew poetry had never been translated ; if a revival of the study of Greek literature had never taken place ; if no monuments of ancient sculpture had been handed down to us ; and if the poetry of the religion of the ancient world had been extinguished together with its belief. The human mind could never, except by the intervention of these excitements, have been awakened to the invention of the grosser sciences, and that application of analytical reasoning to the aberrations of society, which it is now attempted to exalt over the direct expression of the inventive and creative faculty itself.

\* Although Rousseau has been thus classed, he was essentially a poet. The others, even Voltaire, were mere reasoners.



We have more moral, political, and historical wisdom, than we know how to reduce into practice; we have more scientific and economical knowledge than can be accommodated to the just distribution of the produce which it multiplies. The poetry, in these systems of thought, is concealed by the accumulation of facts and calculating processes. There is no want of knowledge respecting what is wisest and best in morals, government, and political economy, or at least what is wiser and better than what men now practise and endure. But we let "*I dare not wait upon I would*, like the poor cat in the adage." We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life: our calculations have outrun conception; we have eaten more than we can digest. The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world, has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave. To what but a cultivation of the mechanical arts in a degree disproportioned to the presence of the creative faculty, which is the basis of all knowledge, is to be attributed the abuse of all invention for abridging and combining labour, to the exasperation of the inequality of mankind? From what other cause has it arisen that the discoveries which should have lightened, have added a weight to the curse imposed on Adam? Poetry, and the principle of Self, of which money is the visible incarnation, are the God and Mammon of the world.

The functions of the poetical faculty are twofold; by one it creates new materials of knowledge, and power, and pleasure; by the other it engenders in the mind a desire to reproduce and arrange them according to a certain rhythm and order, which may be called the beautiful and the good. The cultivation of poetry is never more to



be desired than at periods when, from an excess of the selfish and calculating principle, the accumulation of the materials of external life exceed the quantity of the power of assimilating them to the internal laws of human nature. The body has then become too unwieldy for that which animates it.

Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred. It is at the same time the root and blossom of all other systems of thought; it is that from which all spring, and that which adorns all; and that which, if blighted, denies the fruit and the seed, and withholds from the barren world the nourishment and the succession of the scions of the tree of life. It is the perfect and consummate surface and bloom of all things; it is as the odour and the colour of the rose to the texture of the elements which compose it, as the form and splendour of unfaded beauty to the secrets of anatomy and corruption. What were virtue, love, patriotism, friendship,—what were the scenery of this beautiful universe which we inhabit; what were our consolations on this side of the grave—and what were our aspirations beyond it, if poetry did not ascend to bring light and fire from those eternal regions where the owl-winged faculty of calculation dare not ever soar? Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, “I will compose poetry.” The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the

greatness of the results ; but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet. I appeal to the greatest poets of the present day, whether it is not an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labour and study. The toil and the delay recommended by critics, can be justly interpreted to mean no more than a careful observation of the inspired moments, and an artificial connection of the spaces between their suggestions, by the intertexture of conventional expressions ; a necessity only imposed by the limitedness of the poetical faculty itself : for Milton conceived the *Paradise Lost* as a whole before he executed it in portions. We have his own authority also for the muse having "dictated" to him the "unpremeditated song." And let this be an answer to those who would allege the fifty-six various readings of the first line of the *Orlando Furioso*. Compositions so produced are to poetry what mosaic is to painting. The instinct and intuition of the poetical faculty is still more observable in the plastic and pictorial arts : a great statue or picture grows under the power of the artist as a child in the mother's womb ; and the very mind which directs the hands in formation, is incapable of accounting to itself for the origin, the gradations, or the media of the process.

Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds. We are aware of evanescent visitations of thought and feeling, sometimes associated with place or person, sometimes regarding our own mind alone, and always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden, but elevating and delightful beyond all expression : so that even in the desire and the regret they leave, there cannot but be pleasure, participating as it does in the nature of its object. It is as it were the

interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own ; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea, which the coming calm erases, and whose traces remain only, as on the wrinkled sand which paves it. These and corresponding conditions of being are experienced principally by those of the most delicate sensibility and the most enlarged imagination ; and the state of mind produced by them is at war with every base desire. The enthusiasm of virtue, love, patriotism, and friendship, is essentially linked with such emotions ; and whilst they last, self appears as what it is, an atom to a universe. Poets are not only subject to these experiences as spirits of the most refined organisation, but they can colour all that they combine with the evanescent hues of this ethereal world ; a word, a trait in the representation of a scene or a passion, will touch the enchanted chord, and reanimate, in those who have ever experienced those emotions, the sleeping, the cold, the buried image of the past. Poetry thus makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world ; it arrests the vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life, and veiling them, or in language or in form, sends them forth among mankind, bearing sweet news of kindred joy to those with whom their sisters abide—abide, because there is no portal of expression from the caverns of the spirit which they inhabit into the universe of things. Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man.

Poetry turns all things to loveliness ; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed ; it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change ; it subdues to union, under its light yoke, all irreconcilable things. It transmutes all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes : its secret alchemy turns to potable gold the

poisonous waters which flow from death through life; it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms.

All things exist as they are perceived; at least in relation to the percipient. "The mind is its own place, and of itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven." But poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions. And whether it spreads its own figured curtain, or withdraws life's dark veil from before the scene of things, it equally creates for us a being within our being. It makes us the inhabitant of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos. It reproduces the common universe of which we are portions and percipients, and it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being. It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know. It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration. It justifies the bold and true word of Tasso: *Non merita nome di creatore, se non Iddio ed il Poeta.*

A poet, as he is the author to others of the highest wisdom, pleasure, virtue and glory, so he ought personally to be the happiest, the best, the wisest, and the most illustrious of men. As to his glory, let time be challenged to declare whether the fame of any other institutor of human life be comparable to that of a poet. That he is the wisest, the happiest, and the best, inasmuch as he is a poet, is equally incontrovertible: the greatest poets have been men of the most spotless virtue, of the most consummate prudence, and, if we would look into the interior of their lives, the most fortunate of men: and the exceptions, as they regard those who possessed the poetic faculty in a high yet inferior degree, will be found on consideration to confine rather than destroy the rule. Let us for a moment stoop to the arbitration of popular breath,

and usurping and uniting in our own persons the incompatible characters of accuser, witness, judge and executioner, let us decide without trial, testimony, or form, that certain motives of those who are "there sitting where we dare not soar," are reprehensible. Let us assume that Homer was a drunkard, that Virgil was a flatterer, that Horace was a coward, that Tasso was a madman, that Lord Bacon was a speculator, that Raphael was a libertine, that Spenser was a poet laureate. It is inconsistent with this division of our subject to cite living poets, but posterity has done ample justice to the great names now referred to. Their errors have been weighed and found to have been dust in the balance; if their sins "were as scarlet, they are now white as snow:" they have been washed in the blood of the mediator and redeemer, time. Observe in what a ludicrous chaos the imputations of real or fictitious crime have been confused in the contemporary calumnies against poetry and poets; consider how little is, as it appears—or appears, as it is; look to your own motives, and judge not, lest ye be judged.

Poetry, as has been said, differs in this respect from logic, that it is not subject to the control of the active powers of the mind, and that its birth and recurrence have no necessary connexion with the consciousness or will. It is presumptuous to determine that these are the necessary conditions of all mental causation, when mental effects are experienced insusceptible of being referred to them. The frequent recurrence of the poetical power, it is obvious to suppose, may produce in the mind a habit of order and harmony correlative with its own nature and with its effects upon other minds. But in the intervals of inspiration, and they may be frequent without being durable, a poet becomes a man, and is abandoned to the sudden reflux of the influences under which others habitually live. But as he is more delicately organised than other men, and sensible to pain and pleasure, both his own and



that of others, in a degree unknown to them, he will avoid the one and pursue the other with an ardour proportioned to this difference. And he renders himself obnoxious to calumny, when he neglects to observe the circumstances under which these objects of universal pursuit and flight have disguised themselves in one another's garments.

But there is nothing necessarily evil in this error, and thus cruelty, envy, revenge, avarice, and the passions purely evil, have never formed any portion of the popular imputations on the lives of poets.

I have thought it most favourable to the cause of truth to set down these remarks according to the order in which they were suggested to my mind, by a consideration of the subject itself, instead of observing the formality of a polemical reply ; but if the view which they contain be just, they will be found to involve a refutation of the arguers against poetry, so far at least as regards the first division of the subject. I can readily conjecture what should have moved the gall of some learned and intelligent writers who quarrel with certain versifiers ; I, like them, confess myself unwilling to be stunned by the *Theseids* of the hoarse Codri of the day. Bavius and Mævius undoubtedly are, as they ever were, insufferable persons. But it belongs to a philosophical critic to distinguish rather than confound.

The first part of these remarks has related to poetry in its elements and principles ; and it has been shown, as well as the narrow limits assigned them would permit, that what is called poetry in a restricted sense, has a common source with all other forms of order and of beauty, according to which the materials of human life are susceptible of being arranged, and which is poetry in an universal sense.

The second part will have for its object an application of these principles to the present state of the cultivation of poetry, and a defence of the attempt to idealise the modern



forms of manners and opinions, and compel them into a subordination to the imaginative and creative faculty. For the literature of England, an energetic development of which has ever preceded or accompanied a great and free development of the national will, has arisen as it were from a new birth. In spite of the low-thoughted envy which would undervalue contemporary merit, our own will be a memorable age in intellectual achievements, and we live among such philosophers and poets as surpass beyond comparison any who have appeared since the last national struggle for civil and religious liberty. The most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution, is poetry. At such periods there is an accumulation of the power of communicating and receiving intense and impassioned conceptions respecting man and nature. The persons in whom this power resides, may often, as far as regards many portions of their nature, have little apparent correspondence with that spirit of good of which they are the ministers. But even whilst they deny and abjure, they are yet compelled to serve, the power which is seated on the throne of their own soul. It is impossible to read the compositions of the most celebrated writers of the present day without being startled with the electric life which burns within their words. They measure the circumference and sound the depths of human nature with a comprehensive and all-penetrating spirit, and they are themselves perhaps the most sincerely astonished at its manifestations ; for it is less their spirit than the spirit of the age. Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration ; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present ; the words which express what they understand not ; the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire ; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.



AN ESSAY ON PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

By ROBERT BROWNING



## AN ESSAY ON PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

An opportunity having presented itself for the acquisition of a series of unedited letters by Shelley, all more or less directly supplementary to and illustrative of the collection already published by Mr. Moxon, that gentleman has decided on securing them. They will prove an acceptable addition to a body of correspondence, the value of which towards a right understanding of its author's purpose and work, may be said to exceed that of any similar contribution exhibiting the worldly relations of a poet whose genius has operated by a different law.

Doubtless we accept gladly the biography of an objective poet, as the phrase now goes ; one whose endeavour has been to reproduce things external (whether the phenomena of the scenic universe, or the manifested action of the human heart and brain) with an immediate reference, in every case, to the common eye and apprehension of his fellow men, assumed capable of receiving and profiting by this reproduction. It has been obtained through the poet's double faculty of seeing external objects more clearly, widely, and deeply, than is possible to the average mind, at the same time that he is so acquainted and in sympathy with its narrower comprehension as to be careful to supply it with no other materials than it can combine into an intelligible whole. The auditory of such a poet will include, not only the intelligences which, save for such assistance, would have missed the deeper meaning and enjoyment of the original objects, but also the spirits of a like endowment with his own, who, by means of his abstract, can

forthwith pass to the reality it was made from, and either corroborate their impressions of things known already, or supply themselves with new from whatever shows in the inexhaustible variety of existence may have hitherto escaped their knowledge. Such a poet is properly the ποιητής, the fashioner ; and the thing fashioned, his poetry, will of necessity be substantive, projected from himself and distinct. We are ignorant what the inventor of "Othello" conceived of that fact as he beheld it in completeness, how he accounted for it, under what known law he registered its nature, or to what unknown law he traced its coincidence. We learn only what he intended we should learn by that particular exercise of his power,—the fact itself,—which, with its infinite significances, each of us receives for the first time as a creation, and is hereafter left to deal with, as, in proportion to his own intelligence, he best may. We are ignorant, and would fain be otherwise.

Doubtless, with respect to such a poet, we covet his biography. We desire to look back upon the process of gathering together in a lifetime, the materials of the work we behold entire ; of elaborating, perhaps under difficulty and with hindrance, all that is familiar to our admiration in the apparent facility of success. And the inner impulse of this effort and operation, what induced it ? Did a soul's delight in its own extended sphere of vision set it, for the gratification of an insuppressible power, on labour, as other men are set on rest ? Or did a sense of duty or of love lead it to communicate its own sensations to mankind ? Did an irresistible sympathy with men compel it to bring down and suit its own provision of knowledge and beauty to their narrow scope ? Did the personality of such an one stand like an open watch-tower in the midst of the territory it is erected to gaze on, and were the storms and calms, the stars and meteors, its watchman was wont to report of, the habitual variegation of his every-day life, as they glanced across its open roof or lay reflected



on its four-square parapet? Or did some sunken and darkened chamber of imagery witness, in the artificial illumination of every storied compartment we are permitted to contemplate, how rare and precious were the outlooks through here and there an embrasure upon a world beyond, and how blankly would have pressed on the artificer the boundary of his daily life, except for the amorous diligence with which he had rendered permanent by art whatever came to diversify the gloom? Still, fraught with instruction and interest as such details undoubtedly are, we can, if needs be, dispense with them. The man passes, the work remains. The work speaks for itself, as we say: and the biography of the worker is no more necessary to an understanding or enjoyment of it, than is a model or anatomy of some tropical tree, to the right tasting of the fruit we are familiar with on the market-stall,—or a geologist's map and stratification, to the prompt recognition of the hill-top, our land-mark of every day.

We turn with stronger needs to the genius of an opposite tendency—the subjective poet of modern classification. He, gifted like the objective poet with the fuller perception of nature and man, is impelled to embody the thing he perceives, not so much with reference to the many below as to the One above him, the supreme Intelligence which apprehends all things in their absolute truth,—an ultimate view ever aspired to, if but partially attained, by the poet's own soul. Not what man sees, but what God sees—the *Ideas* of Plato, seeds of creation lying burningly on the Divine Hand—it is toward these that he struggles. Not with the combination of humanity in action, but with the primal elements of humanity he has to do; and he digs where he stands,—preferring to seek them in his own soul as the nearest reflex of that absolute Mind, according to the intuitions of which he desires to perceive and speak. Such a poet does not deal habitually with the picturesque group-

ings and tempestuous tossings of the forest-trees, but with their roots and fibres naked to the chalk and stone. He does not paint pictures and hang them on the walls, but rather carries them on the retina of his own eyes : we must look deep into his human eyes, to see those pictures on them. He is rather a seer, accordingly, than a fashioner, and what he produces will be less a work than an effluence. That effluence cannot be easily considered in abstraction from his personality,—being indeed the very radiance and aroma of his personality, projected from it but not separated. Therefore, in our approach to the poetry, we necessarily approach the personality of the poet ; in apprehending it we apprehend him, and certainly we cannot love it without loving him. Both for love's and for understanding's sake we desire to know him, and as readers of his poetry must be readers of his biography also.

I shall observe, in passing, that it seems not so much from any essential distinction in the faculty of the two poets or in the nature of the objects contemplated by either, as in the more immediate adaptability of these objects to the distinct purpose of each, that the objective poet, in his appeal to the aggregate human mind, chooses to deal with the doings of men, (the result of which dealing, in its pure form, when even description, as suggesting a describer, is dispensed with, is what we call dramatic poetry), while the subjective poet, whose study has been himself, appealing through himself to the absolute Divine mind, prefers to dwell upon those external scenic appearances which strike out most abundantly and uninterruptedly his inner light and power, selects that silence of the earth and sea in which he can best hear the beating of his individual heart, and leaves the noisy, complex, yet imperfect exhibitions of nature in the manifold experience of man around him, which serve only to distract and suppress the working of his brain. These opposite tendencies of genius will be more readily descried in their artistic effect than

in their moral spring and cause. Pushed to an extreme and manifested as a deformity, they will be seen plainest of all in the fault of either artist, when subsidiarily to the human interest of his work his occasional illustrations from scenic nature are introduced as in the earlier works of the originative painters—men and women filling the foreground with consummate mastery, while mountain, grove and rivulet show like an anticipatory revenge on that succeeding race of landscape-painters whose “figures” disturb the perfection of their earth and sky. It would be idle to inquire, of these two kinds of poetic faculty in operation, which is the higher or even rarer endowment. If the subjective might seem to be the ultimate requirement of every age, the objective, in the strictest state, must still retain its original value. For it is with this world, as starting point and basis alike, that we shall always have to concern ourselves: the world is not to be learned and thrown aside, but reverted to and relearned. The spiritual comprehension may be infinitely subtilised, but the raw material it operates upon, must remain. There may be no end of the poets who communicate to us what they see in an object with reference to their own individuality; what it was before they saw it, in reference to the aggregate human mind, will be as desirable to know as ever. Nor is there any reason why these two modes of poetic faculty may not issue hereafter from the same poet in successive perfect works, examples of which, according to what are now considered the exigences of art, we have hitherto possessed in distinct individuals only. A mere running in of the one faculty upon the other, is, of course, the ordinary circumstance. Far more rarely it happens that either is found so decidedly prominent and superior, as to be pronounced comparatively pure: while of the perfect shield, with the gold and the silver side set up for all comers to challenge, there has yet been no instance. Either faculty in its eminent state is doubtless conceded by Providence as a

best gift to men, according to their especial want. There is a time when the general eye has, so to speak, absorbed its fill of the phenomena around it, whether spiritual or material, and desires rather to learn the exacter significance of what it possesses, than to receive any augmentation of what is possessed. Then is the opportunity for the poet of loftier vision, to lift his fellows, with their half-apprehensions, up to his own sphere, by intensifying the import of details and rounding the universal meaning. The influence of such an achievement will not soon die out. A tribe of successors (Homerides) working more or less in the same spirit, dwell on his discoveries and reinforce his doctrine; till, at unawares, the world is found to be subsisting wholly on the shadow of a reality, on sentiments diluted from passions, on the tradition of a fact, the convention of a moral, the straw of last year's harvest. Then is the imperative call for the appearance of another sort of poet, who shall at once replace this intellectual rumination of food swallowed long ago, by a supply of the fresh and living swathe; getting at new substance by breaking up the assumed wholes into parts of independent and unclassed value, careless of the unknown laws for recombining them (it will be the business of yet another poet to suggest those hereafter), prodigal of objects for men's outer and not inner sight, shaping for their uses a new and different creation from the last, which it displaces by the right of life over death,—to endure until, in the inevitable process, its very sufficiency to itself shall require, at length, an exposition of its affinity to something higher,—when the positive yet conflicting facts shall again precipitate themselves under a harmonising law, and one more degree will be apparent for a poet to climb in that mighty ladder, of which, however cloud-involved and undefined may glimmer the topmost step, the world dares no longer doubt that its gradations ascend.

Such being the two kinds of artists, it is naturally, as I

have shown, with the biography of the subjective poet that we have the deeper concern. Apart from his recorded life altogether, we might fail to determine with satisfactory precision to what class his productions belong, and what amount of praise is assignable to the producer. Certainly, in the face of any conspicuous achievement of genius, philosophy, no less than sympathetic instinct, warrants our belief in a great moral purpose having mainly inspired even where it does not visibly look out of the same. Greatness in a work suggests an adequate instrumentality ; and none of the lower incitements, however they may avail to initiate or even effect many considerable displays of power, simulating the nobler inspiration to which they are mistakenly referred, have been found able, under the ordinary conditions of humanity, to task themselves to the end of so exacting a performance as a poet's complete work. As soon will the galvanism that provokes to violent action the muscles of a corpse, induce it to cross the chamber steadily : sooner. The love of displaying power for the display's sake, the love of riches, of distinction, of notoriety,—the desire of a triumph over rivals, and the vanity in the applause of friends,—each and all of such whetted appetites grow intenser by exercise and increasingly sagacious as to the best and readiest means of self-appeasement,—while for any of their ends, whether the money or the pointed finger of the crowd, or the flattery and hate to heart's content, there are cheaper prices to pay, they will all find soon enough, than the bestowment of a life upon a labour, hard, slow, and not sure. Also, assuming the proper moral aim to have produced a work, there are many and various states of an aim : it may be more intense than clear-sighted, or too easily satisfied with a lower field of activity than a steadier aspiration would reach. All the bad poetry in the world (accounted poetry, that is, by its affinities) will be found to result from some one of the infinite degrees of discrepancy between the attributes of the poet's soul,



occasioning a want of correspondency between his work and the verities of nature,—issuing in poetry, false under whatever form, which shows a thing not as it is to mankind generally, nor as it is to the particular describer, but as it is supposed to be for some unreal neutral mood, midway between both and of value to neither, and living its brief minute simply through the indolence of whoever accepts it or his incapacity to denounce a cheat. Although of such depths of failure there can be no question here we must in every case betake ourselves to the review of a poet's life ere we determine some of the nicer questions concerning his poetry,—more especially if the performance we seek to estimate aright, has been obstructed and cut short of completion by circumstances,—a disastrous youth or a premature death. We may learn from the biography whether his spirit invariably saw and spoke from the last height to which it had attained. An absolute vision is not for this world, but we are permitted a continual approximation to it, every degree of which in the individual, provided it exceed the attainment of the masses, must procure him a clear advantage. Did the poet ever attain to a higher platform than where he rested and exhibited a result? Did he know more than he spoke of?

I concede however, in respect to the subject of our study as well as some few other illustrious examples, that the unmistakeable quality of the verse would be evidence enough, under usual circumstances, not only of the kind and degree of the intellectual but of the moral constitution of Shelley: the whole personality of the poet shining forward from the poems, without much need of going further to seek it. The "Remains"—produced within a period of ten years, and at a season of life when other men of at all comparable genius have hardly done more than prepare the eye for future sight and the tongue for speech—present us with the complete enginery of a poet, as signal in the excellence of its several adaptitudes as transcendant in the combination of



effects,—examples, in fact, of the whole poet's function of beholding with an understanding keenness the universe, nature and man, in their actual state of perfection in imperfection,—of the whole poet's virtue of being untempted by the manifold partial developments of beauty and good on every side, into leaving them the ultimates he found them,—induced by the facility of the gratification of his own sense of those qualities, or by the pleasure of acquiescence in the short-comings of his predecessors in art, and the pain of disturbing their conventionalisms,—the whole poet's virtue, I repeat, of looking higher than any manifestation yet made of both beauty and good, in order to suggest from the utmost actual realisation of the one a corresponding capability in the other, and out of the calm, purity and energy of nature, to reconstitute and store up for the forthcoming stage of man's being, a gift in repayment of that former gift, in which man's own thought and passion had been lavished by the poet on the else-incompleted magnificence of the sunrise, the else-uninterpreted mystery of the lake,—so drawing out, lifting up, and assimilating this ideal of a future man, thus descried as possible, to the present reality of the poet's soul already arrived at the higher state of development, and still aspirant to elevate and extend itself in conformity with its still-improving perceptions of, no longer the eventual Human, but the actual Divine. In conjunction with which noble and rare powers, came the subordinate power of delivering these attained results to the world in an embodiment of verse more closely answering to and indicative of the process of the informing spirit, (failing as it occasionally does, in art, only to succeed in highest art),—with a diction more adequate to the task in its natural and acquired richness, its material colour and spiritual transparency,—the whole being moved by and suffused with a music at once of the soul and the sense, expressive both of an external might of sincere passion and an internal fitness and consonancy,—

than can be attributed to any other writer whose record is among us. Such was the spheric poetical faculty of Shelley, as its own self-sufficing central light, radiating equally through immaturity and accomplishment, through many fragments and occasional completion, reveals it to a competent judgment.

But the acceptance of this truth by the public, has been retarded by certain objections which cast us back on the evidence of biography, even with Shelley's poetry in our hands. Except for the particular character of these objections, indeed, the non-appreciation of his contemporaries would simply class, now that it is over, with a series of experiences which have necessarily happened and needlessly been wondered at, ever since the world began, and concerning which any present anger may well be moderated, no less in justice to our forerunners than in policy to ourselves. For the misapprehensiveness of his age is exactly what a poet is sent to remedy ; and the interval between his operation and the generally perceptible effect of it, is no greater, less indeed, than in many other departments of the great human effort. The "*E pur si muove*" of the astronomer was as bitter a word as any uttered before or since by a poet over his rejected living work, in that depth of conviction which is so like despair.

But in this respect was the experience of Shelley peculiarly unfortunate—that the disbelief in him as a man, even preceded the disbelief in him as a writer ; the misconstruction of his moral nature preparing the way for the misappreciation of his intellectual labours. There existed from the beginning,—simultaneous with, indeed anterior to his earliest noticeable works, and not brought forward to counteract any impression they had succeeded in making,—certain charges against his private character and life, which, if substantiated to their whole breadth, would materially disturb, I do not attempt to deny, our reception and enjoyment of his works, however wonderful the artistic

qualities of these. For we are not sufficiently supplied with instances of genius of his order, to be able to pronounce certainly how many of its constituent parts have been tasked and strained to the production of a given lie, and how high and pure a mood of the creative mind may be dramatically simulated as the poet's habitual and exclusive one. The doubts, therefore, arising from such a question, required to be set at rest, as they were effectually, by those early authentic notices of Shelley's career and the corroborative accompaniment of his letters, in which not only the main tenor and principal result of his life, but the purity and beauty of many of the processes which had conduced to them, were made apparent enough for the general reader's purpose,—whoever lightly condemned Shelley first, on the evidence of reviews and gossip, as lightly acquitting him now, on that of memoirs and correspondence. Still, it is advisable to lose no opportunity of strengthening and completing the chain of biographical testimony; much more, of course, for the sake of the poet's original lovers, whose volunteered sacrifice of particular principle in favour of absorbing sympathy we might desire to dispense with, than for the sake of his foolish haters, who have long since diverted upon other objects their obtuseness or malignancy. A full life of Shelley should be written at once, while the materials for it continue in reach; not to minister to the curiosity of the public, but to obliterate the last stain of that false life which was forced on the public's attention before it had any curiosity on the matter,—a biography, composed in harmony with the present general disposition to have faith in him, yet not shrinking from a candid statement of all ambiguous passages, through a reasonable confidence that the most doubtful of them will be found consistent with a belief in the eventual perfection of his character, according to the poor limits of our humanity. Nor will men persist in confounding, any more than God confounds, with

genuine infidelity and an athëism of the heart, those passionate, impatient struggles of a boy towards distant truth and love, made in the dark, and ended by one sweep of the natural seas before the full moral sunrise could shine out on him. Crude convictions of boyhood, conveyed in imperfect and inapt forms of speech,—for such things all boys have been pardoned. There are growing-pains, accompanied by temporary distortion, of the soul also. And it would be hard indeed upon this young Titan of genius, murmuring in divine music his human ignorances, through his very thirst for knowledge, and his rebellion, in mere aspiration to law, if the melody itself substantiated the error, and the tragic cutting short of life perpetuated into sins, such faults as, under happier circumstances, would have been left behind by the consent of the most arrogant moralist, forgotten on the lowest steps of youth.

The responsibility of presenting to the public a biography of Shelley, does not, however, lie with me: I have only to make it a little easier by arranging these few supplementary letters, with a recognition of the value of the whole collection. This value I take to consist in a most truthful conformity of the Correspondence, in its limited degree, with the moral and intellectual character of the writer as displayed in the highest manifestations of his genius. Letters and poems are obviously an act of the same mind, produced by the same law, only differing in the application to the individual or collective understanding. Letters and poems may be used indifferently as the basement of our opinion upon the writer's character; the finished expression of a sentiment in the poems, giving light and significance to the rudiments of the same in the letters, and these, again, in their incipency and unripeness, authenticating the exalted mood and reattaching it to the personality of the writer. The musician speaks on the note he sings with; there is no change in the scale, as he diminishes the volume into familiar

intercourse. There is nothing of that jarring between the man and the author, which has been found so amusing or so melancholy ; no dropping of the tragic mask, as the crowd melts away ; no mean discovery of the real motives of a life's achievement, often, in other lives, laid bare as pitifully as when, at the close of a holiday, we catch sight of the internal lead-pipes and wood-valves, to which, and not to the ostensible conch and dominant Triton of the fountain, we have owed our admired water-work. No breaking out, in household privacy, of hatred, anger and scorn, incongruous with the higher mood and suppressed artistically in the book : no brutal return to self-delighting, when the audience of philanthropic schemes is out of hearing : no indecent stripping off the grander feeling and rule of life as too costly and cumbrous for every-day wear. Whatever Shelley was, he was with an admirable sincerity. It was not always truth that he thought and spoke ; but in the purity of truth he spoke and thought always. Everywhere is apparent his belief in the existence of Good, to which Evil is an accident ; his faithful holding by what he assumed to be the former, going everywhere in company with the tenderest pity for those acting or suffering on the opposite hypothesis. For he was tender, though tenderness is not always the characteristic of very sincere natures ; he was eminently both tender and sincere. And not only do the same affection and yearning after the well-being of his kind, appear in the letters as in the poems, but they express themselves by the same theories and plans, however crude and unsound. There is no reservation of a subtler, less costly, more serviceable remedy for his own ill, than he has proposed for the general one ; nor does he ever contemplate an object on his own account, from a less elevation than he uses in exhibiting it to the world. How shall we help believing Shelley to have been, in his ultimate attainment, the splendid spirit of his own best poetry, when we find



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even his carnal speech to agree faithfully, at faintest as at strongest, with the tone and rhythm of his most oracular utterances ?

For the rest, these new letters are not offered as presenting any new feature of the poet's character. Regarded in themselves, and as the substantive productions of a man, their importance would be slight. But they possess interest beyond their limits, in confirming the evidence just dwelt on, of the poetical mood of Shelley being only the intensification of his habitual mood ; the same tongue only speaking, for want of the special excitement to sing. The very first letter, as one instance for all, strikes the key-note of the predominating sentiment of Shelley throughout his whole life—his sympathy with the oppressed. And when we see him at so early an age, casting out, under the influence of such a sympathy, letters and pamphlets on every side, we accept it as the simple exemplification of the sincerity, with which, at the close of his life, he spoke of himself, as—

“ One whose heart a stranger's tear might wear  
As water-drops the sandy fountain stone ;  
Who loved and pitied all things, and could moan  
For woes which others hear not, and could see  
The absent with the glass of phantasy,  
And near the poor and trampled sit and weep,  
Following the captive to his dungeon deep—  
One who was as a nerve o'er which do creep  
The else-unfelt oppressions of this earth.”

Such sympathy with his kind was evidently developed in him to an extraordinary and even morbid degree, at a period when the general intellectual powers it was impatient to put in motion, were immature or deficient.

I conjecture, from a review of the various publications of Shelley's youth, that one of the causes of his failure at the outset, was the peculiar *practicalness* of his mind, which



was not without a determinate effect on his progress in theorising. An ordinary youth, who turns his attention to similar subjects, discovers falsities, incongruities, and various points for amendment, and, in the natural advance of the purely critical spirit unchecked by considerations of remedy, keeps up before his young eyes so many instances of the same error and wrong, that he finds himself unawares arrived at the startling conclusion, that all must be changed—or nothing: in the face of which plainly impossible achievement, he is apt (looking perhaps a little more serious by the time he touches at the decisive issue), to feel, either carelessly or considerately, that his own attempting a single piece of service would be worse than useless even, and to refer the whole task to another age and person—safe in proportion to his incapacity. Wanting words to speak, he has never made a fool of himself by speaking. But, in Shelley's case, the early fervour and power to *see*, was accompanied by as precocious a fertility to *contrive*: he endeavoured to realise as he went on idealising; every wrong had simultaneously its remedy, and, out of the strength of his hatred for the former, he took the strength of his confidence in the latter—till suddenly he stood pledged to the defence of a set of miserable little expedients, just as if they represented great principles, and to an attack upon various great principles, really so, without leaving himself time to examine whether, because they were antagonistical to the remedy he had suggested, they must therefore be identical or even essentially connected with the wrong he sought to cure,—playing with blind passion into the hands of his enemies, and dashing at whatever red cloak was held forth to him, as the cause of the fireball he had last been stung with—mistaking Churchdom for Christianity, and for marriage, “the sale of love” and the law of sexual oppression.

Gradually, however, he was leaving behind him this low

practical dexterity, unable to keep up with his widening intellectual perception ; and, in exact proportion as he did so, his true power strengthened and proved itself. Gradually he was raised above the contemplation of spots and the attempt at effacing them, to the great Abstract Light, and, through the discrepancy of the creation, to the sufficiency of the First Cause. Gradually he was learning that the best way of removing abuses is to stand fast by truth. Truth is one, as they are manifold ; and innumerable negative effects are produced by the upholding of one positive principle. I shall say what I think,—had Shelley lived he would have finally ranged himself with the Christians ; his very instinct for helping the weaker side (if numbers make strength), his very “ hate of hate,” which at first mistranslated itself into delirious Queen Mab notes and the like, would have got clearer-sighted by exercise. The preliminary step to following Christ, is the leaving the dead to bury their dead—not clamouring on His doctrine for an especial solution of difficulties which are referable to the general problem of the universe. Already he had attained to a profession of “ a worship to the Spirit of good within, which requires (before it sends that inspiration forth, which impresses its likeness upon all it creates) devoted and disinterested homage, *as Coleridge says*,”—and Paul likewise. And we find in one of his last exquisite fragments, avowedly a record of one of his own mornings and its experience, as it dawned on him at his soul and body’s best in his boat on the Serchio—that as surely as

“ The stars burnt out in the pale blue air,  
 And the thin white moon lay withering there—  
 Day had kindled the dewy woods,  
 And the rocks above, and the stream below,  
 And the vapours in their multitudes,  
 And the Apennine’s shroud of summer snow—  
 Day had awakened all things that be ; ”

just so surely, he tells us (stepping forward from this delicious dance-music, choragus-like, into the grander measure befitting the final enunciation),

" All rose to do the task He set to each,  
Who shaped us to his ends and not our own ;  
The million rose to learn, and One to teach  
What none yet ever knew or can be known."

No more difference than this, from David's pregnant conclusion so long ago !

Meantime, as I call Shelley a moral man, because he was true, simple-hearted, and brave, and because what he acted corresponded to what he knew, so I call him a man of religious mind, because every audacious negative cast up by him against the Divine, was interpenetrated with a mood of reverence and adoration,—and because I find him everywhere taking for granted some of the capital dogmas of Christianity, while most vehemently denying their historical basement. There is such a thing as an efficacious knowledge of and belief in the politics of Junius, or the poetry of Rowley, though a man should at the same time dispute the title of Chatterton to the one, and consider the author of the other, as Byron wittily did, " really, truly, nobody at all." \* There is even such a thing, we come to learn wonderingly in these very letters, as a profound sensibility and adaptitude for art, while the

\* Or, to take our illustrations from the writings of Shelley himself, there is such a thing as admirably appreciating a work by Andrea Verocchio,—and fancifully characterising the Pisan Torre Guelfa by the Ponte a Mare, black against the sunsets,—and consummately painting the islet of San Clemente with its penitentiary for rebellious priests, to the west between Venice and the Lido—while you believe the first to be a fragment of an antique sarcophagus,—the second, Ugolino's Tower of Famine (the vestiges of which should be sought for in the Piazza de' Cavalieri)—and the third (as I convinced myself last summer at Venice), San Servolo with its madhouse—which, far from being " windowless," is as full of windows as a barrack.

science of the percipient is so little advanced as to admit of his stronger admiration for Guido (and Carlo Dolce!) than for Michael Angelo. A Divine Being has Himself said, that "a word against the Son of man shall be forgiven to a man," while "a word against the Spirit of God" (implying a general deliberate preference of perceived evil to perceived good) "shall not be forgiven to a man." Also, in religion, one earnest and unextorted assertion of belief should outweigh, as a matter of testimony, many assertions of unbelief. The fact that there is a gold-region is established by the finding of one lump, though you miss the vein never so often.

He died before his youth ended. In taking the measure of him as a man, he must be considered on the whole and at his ultimate spiritual stature, and not be judged of at the immaturity and by the mistakes of ten years before: that, indeed, would be to judge of the author of "Julian and Maddalo" by "Zastrozzi." Let the whole truth be told of his worst mistake. I believe, for my own part, that if anything could now shame or grieve Shelley, it would be an attempt to vindicate him at the expense of another.

In forming a judgment, I would, however, press on the reader the simple justice of considering tenderly his constitution of body as well as mind, and how unfavourable it was to the steady symmetries of conventional life; the body, in the torture of incurable disease, refusing to give repose to the bewildered soul, tossing in its hot fever of the fancy,—and the laudanum-bottle making but a perilous and pitiful truce between these two. He was constantly subject to "that state of mind" (I quote his own note to "Hellas") "in which ideas may be supposed to assume the force of sensation, through the confusion of thought with the objects of thought, and excess of passion animating the creations of the imagination:" in other words, he was liable to remarkable delusions and hallucinations. The nocturnal attack in Wales, for instance, was assuredly a delusion;

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and I venture to express my own conviction, derived from a little attention to the circumstances of either story, that the idea of the enamoured lady following him to Naples, and of the "man in the cloak" who struck him at the Pisan post-office, were equally illusory,—the mere projection, in fact, from himself, of the image of his own love and hate.

"To thirst and find no fill—to wail and wander  
With short unsteady steps—to pause and ponder—  
To feel the blood run through the veins and tingle  
When busy thought and blind sensation mingle,—  
To nurse the image of *unfelt caresses*  
Till dim imagination just possesses  
The half-created shadow"—

of unfelt caresses,—and of unfelt blows as well: to such conditions was his genius subject. It was not at Rome only (where he heard a mystic voice exclaiming, "Cenci, Cenci," in reference to the tragic theme which occupied him at the time),—it was not at Rome only that he mistook the cry of "old rags." The habit of somnambulism is said to have extended to the very last days of his life.

Let me conclude with a thought of Shelley as a poet. In the hierarchy of creative minds, it is the presence of the highest faculty that gives first rank, in virtue of its kind, not degree; no pretension of a lower nature, whatever the completeness of development or variety of effect, impeding the precedency of the rarer endowment though only in the germ. The contrary is sometimes maintained; it is attempted to make the lower gifts (which are potentially included in the higher faculty) of independent value, and equal to some exercise of the special function. For instance, should not a poet possess common sense? Then the possession of abundant common sense implies a step towards becoming a poet. Yes; such a step as the lapidary's, when, strong in the fact of carbon entering



largely into the composition of the diamond, he heaps up a sack of charcoal in order to compete with the Koh-i-noor. I pass at once, therefore, from Shelley's minor excellencies to his noblest and predominating characteristic.

This I call his simultaneous perception of Power and Love in the absolute, and of Beauty and Good in the concrete, while he throws, from his poet's station between both, swifter, subtler, and more numerous films for the connexion of each with each, than have been thrown by any modern artificer of whom I have knowledge ; proving how, as he says,

" The spirit of the worm within the sod,  
In love and worship blends itself with God."

I would rather consider Shelley's poetry as a sublime fragmentary essay towards a presentment of the correspondence of the universe to Deity, of the natural to the spiritual, and of the actual to the ideal, than I would isolate and separately appraise the worth of many detachable portions which might be acknowledged as utterly perfect in a lower moral point of view, under the mere conditions of art. It would be easy to take my stand on successful instances of objectivity in Shelley : there is the unrivalled " Cenci ;" there is the " Julian and Maddalo " too ; there is the magnificent " Ode to Naples : " why not regard, it may be said, the less organised matter as the radiant elemental foam and solution, out of which would have been evolved, eventually, creations as perfect even as those ? But I prefer to look for the highest attainment, not simply the high,—and, seeing it, I hold by it. There is surely enough of the work " Shelley " to be known enduringly among men, and, I believe, to be accepted of God, as human work may ; and around the imperfect proportions of such, the most elaborated productions of ordinary art must arrange themselves as inferior illustrations.

It is because I have long held these opinions in assurance



and gratitude, that I catch at the opportunity offered to me of expressing them here; knowing that the alacrity to fulfil an humble office conveys more love than the acceptance of the honour of a higher one, and that better, therefore, than the signal service it was the dream of my boyhood to render to his fame and memory, may be the saying of a few, inadequate words upon these scarcely more important supplementary letters of SHELLEY.

PARIS, *Dec. 4th*, 1851.



## NOTES

- 3, 20. *a beggar or a thief* : Peacock exaggerates little. The formula of the Odyssey to guests of respectable appearance is ' Strangers, who are ye ? Whence sail ye over the wet ways ? On some trading enterprise, or at adventure do ye rove, even as sea-robbers, over the brine, for they wander at hazard of their own lives bringing bale to alien men.' It is thus that Telemachus and his company are greeted at the feast of Nestor, and Odysseus and his folk in the cave of the Cyclops. It was on a visit to Autolycus, ' his mother's noble father, who outdid all men in thievery and skill in swearing,' that Odysseus gained his famous scar. Or beggary might be assumed from the stranger's appearance, as Eumaeus and Melanthius and the suitors successively assumed it from the rags of Odysseus on his return.
- The passage cited from Thucydides deals at some length with the prevalence of piracy among both Hellenes and Barbarians in earlier times, when ' as yet, such an occupation was held to be honourable and not disgraceful.'
- 6, 1. *building cities . . . symphony* : these are commonplaces, but the conjunction makes me suspect that Peacock, as well as Shelley, had been reading Sidney : ' So as *Amphion* was sayde to move stones with his Poetrie to build Thebes ; and *Orpheus* to be listened to by beastes, indeed stony and beastly people.' —*An Apologie for Poetrie*, ed. Shuckburgh, 1896, page 3.
- 7, 26. *and music probably* : Peacock's opinions on the music and painting of classical Greece may be found by the curious in Chapter XIV of *Gryll Grange* ; Shelley's, in his *Discourse on the Manners of the Ancients*.
- 8, 13. *The history of Herodotus is half a poem* : this passage also suggests that Peacock was familiar with some sentences of Sidney : ' And even Historiographers, although theyr lippes sounde of things doone, and veritie be written in theyr fore-heads, have been glad to borrow both fashion, and perchance weight of Poets. So *Herodotus* entituled his Historie by the

name of the nine Muses: and both he, and all the rest that followed him, either stole or usurped of Poetrie their passionate describing of passions; the many particularities of batailles which no man could affirme; or, if that be denied me, long Orations put in the mouthes of great Kings and Captaines, which it is certaine they never pronounced.'—*Apologie*, ed. cit., p. 4. See notes to 30, 20, and 31, 10, *infra*.

- 10, 20. *the limited range of ethical and didactic poetry*: with Peacock's distaste for poetry of this class, and with his opinion (expressed on the previous page) that 'pure reason and dispassionate truth would be perfectly ridiculous in verse,' Shelley would have been in complete accord. In the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, published by Ollier in the summer of 1820, he wrote 'Didactic poetry is my abhorrence; nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse.' See also 34, 1-15.
- 10, 34. *a verbose and minutely-detailed description . . . in an hour*: Wordsworth is not mentioned by name until later, when the English representatives of the age of brass come under review, but I think he was undoubtedly in Peacock's mind when this sentence was written.
- 13, 31. *a necessity for even poets to appear to know something of what they professed to talk of*: I suspect that Peacock was familiar with the delightful admission of Pope, in his *Discourse on Pastoral Poetry*, that 'with respect to the present age, nothing more conduces to make these composures natural, than when some knowledge in rural affairs is discovered'!
23. *A Defence of Poetry*: the opening of Shelley's essay shows at once the influence of Peacock's article. It is pretty clear that he began to write immediately after a re-perusal of *The Four Ages*; Peacock's closing arguments for the uselessness of poetry in modern times were fresh in his memory, and he attacks them in his very first paragraph. By the end of his second paragraph he finds that the 'general considerations' into which he has wandered are leading him too far afield, and he returns in the third to open his defence, as Peacock had opened his attack, with an examination of the origin of poetry in the youth of the world; an examination intended, of course, to exalt poetry and to correct the satirical picture given by his opponent. For this purpose he draws largely upon Sidney, and in a less degree upon Bacon and Plato, as will be seen from the notes supplied to pp. 26-33.
23. *Part I*: see p. 58, ll. 26-34, and note.
- 23, 2. *reason and imagination*: Richard Garnett printed from

manuscript sources (presumably holograph), in his *Relics of Shelley*, 1862, pp. 88–9, some sentences which he says ‘seem to have formed part of the original exordium of the “Defence of Poetry.”’ They may appropriately be given here in bulk, as he prints them, though M. Koszul regards the two latter paragraphs as jottings which ‘evidently belong’ to that part of the *Defence* which begins with the paragraph ‘But poets——,’ on p. 49.

‘In one mode of considering those two classes of action of the human mind which are called reason and imagination, the former may be considered as mind employed upon the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced, and imagination as mind combining the elements of thought itself. It has been termed the power of association; and on an accurate anatomy of the functions of mind, it would be difficult to assign any other origin to the mass of what we perceive and know than this power. Association is, however, rather a law according to which this power is exerted than the power itself; in the same manner as gravitation is a passive expression of the reciprocal tendency of heavy bodies towards their respective centres. Were these bodies conscious of such a tendency, the name which they would assign to that consciousness would express the cause of gravitation; and it were a vain inquiry as to what might be the cause of that cause. Association bears the same relation to imagination as a mode to a source of action: when we look upon shapes in the fire or the clouds and image to ourselves the resemblance of familiar objects, we do no more than seize the relation of certain points of visible objects, and fill up, blend together, \* \* \* \*

‘The imagination is a faculty not less imperial and essential to the happiness and dignity of the human being, than the reason.

‘It is by no means indisputable that what is true, or rather that which the disciples of a certain mechanical and superficial philosophy call true, is more excellent than the beautiful.’

- 23, 9. τὸ ποιεῖν: he is probably thinking of Sidney's words on poetry: ‘But now, let us see how the Greekes named it, and howe they deemed of it. The Greekes called him a Poet, which name hath, as the most excellent, gone thorough other Languages. It commeth of this word *Poiein*, which is to make: wherein I know not, whether by lucke or wisdom, wee Englishmen have mette with the Greekes in calling him a maker.’—*Apologie*, ed. cit., p. 7.

- 26, 13. *the same footsteps*: Bacon had written in his *Second Booke of the Advancement of Learning*, v. 3: 'Is not the precept of a Musitian to fall from a discord or harsh accord, upon a concord, or sweet accord, alike true in affection? Is not the Trope of Musicke, to avoide or slide from the close of Cadence, common with the Trope of Rhetoricke of deceiuing expectation? Is not the delight of the Quavering upon a stop in Musicke, the same with the playing of Light vpon the water?  
 . . . *Splendet tremulo sub Lumine Pontus*. Are not the Organs of the senses of one kinde with the Organs of Reflection, the eye with a glasse, the Eare with a Caue or Straight determined and bounded? Neither are these onely similitudes, as men of narrow obseruation may conceiue them to bee; but the same footsteps of Nature, treading or printing upon seuerall Subiects or Matters.'
- 27, 5. *prophets*: early in his *Apologie* Sidney has a paragraph beginning 'Among the Romans a Poet was called *Vates*, which is as much as a Diviner, Fore-seer, or Prophet, as by his conioyned wordes *Vaticinium* and *Vaticinari* is manifest: so heavenly a title did that excellent people bestow upon this hart-ravishing knowledge.' He proceeds to discuss the *Sortes Virgilianae*, and the fact that the Delphic oracles were delivered in verse.—*Apologie*, ed. cit., p. 5.
- 27, 27-31. *Language, colour, form . . . poetry in a more restricted sense*: Shelley evidently has in mind a passage from Plato's *Symposium*; his own translation, finished in 1818, runs: 'Poetry; which is a general name signifying every cause whereby anything proceeds from that which is not, into that which is; so that the exercise of every inventive art is poetry, and all such artists poets. Yet they are not called poets, but distinguished by other names; and one portion or species of poetry, that which has relation to music and rhythm, is divided from all others, and known by the name belonging to all. For this is alone properly called poetry, and those who exercise the art of this species of poetry, poets.'—*Essays*, etc., 1840, vol. i, p. 134.
- 29, 24. *The distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error*: Sidney had stated this theory as fully and vigorously as Shelley: 'For indeede the greatest part of Poets have apparelled their poeticall inventions in that numbrous kinde of writing which is called verse: indeed but apparelled, verse being but an ornament and no cause to Poetry; sith there have beene many most excellent Poets that never versified, and now swarme many versifiers that neede never aunswere to the name of Poets . . . It is not riming and versing that maketh a Poet,



no more then a long gowne maketh an Advocate ; who though he pleaded in armör should be an Advocate and no Souldier. But it is that fayning notable images of vertues, vices, or what els, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a Poet by. Although indeed the Senate of Poets have chosen verse as their fittest rayment, meaning, as in matter they passed all in all, so in maner to goe beyond them : not speaking (table talke fashion, or like men in a dreame,) words as they chanceably fall from the mouth, but peyzing each sillable of each worde by iust proportion according to the dignitie of the subject.'—*Apologie*, p. 12. This argument is taken up again later in the *Apologie*, p. 36.

- 29, 25. *Plato was essentially a poet* : Sidney was of the same opinion : ' And truely, even *Plato*, whosoever well considereth, shall find, that in the body of his work, though the inside and strength were Philosophy, the skinne as it were and beautie depended most of Poetrie.' And later, ' Of all Philosophers he is the most poetically.'—*Apologie*, pp. 4 and 44. Shelley himself wrote, in the unfinished Preface to his translation of the *Symposium*, ' Plato exhibits the rare union of close and subtle logic, with the Pythian enthusiasm of poetry, melted by the splendour and harmony of his periods into one irresistible stream of musical impressions, which hurry the persuasions onward, as in a breathless career. His language is that of an immortal spirit, rather than a man. Lord Bacon is, perhaps, the only writer who, in these particulars, can be compared with him : his imitator, Cicero, sinks in the comparison into an ape mocking the gestures of a man.'—*Essays*, etc., 1840, i. 71.

- 30, 20-31, 4. *There is this difference . . . distorted* : Sidney had emphasized this. ' The Philosopher therefore and the Historian are they which would win the goale : the one by precept, the other by example. But both not having both, doe both halte. . . . On the other side, the Historian, wanting the precept, is so tyed, not to what shoulde bee, but to what is ; to the particuler truth of things, and not to the general reason of things ; that hys example draweth no necessary consequence, and therefore a lesse fruitfull doctrine.'—*Apologie*, pp. 16-17. Both critics base their arguments on a famous passage of Aristotle : ' It is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen,—what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose. The work of Herodotus might be put into verse, and it would still be a species of history, with metre no less than without it. The

- true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular. By the universal I mean how a person of a certain type will on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity.'—*Poetics*, ix, 1-4, Butcher's translation. See also note to 31, 10 *infra*.
- 30, 35. *epitomes have been called the moths of just history*: by Bacon, in his *Second Booke of the Advancement of Learning*, ii. 4. 'As for the Corruptions and Mothes of History, which are *Epitomes*, the vse of them deserueth to bee banisht, as all men of sound Iudgement haue confessed, as those that haue fretted and corroded the sound bodies of many excellent Histories, and wrought them into base and vnprofitable dreggs.'
- 31, 10-15. *And thus all the great historians . . . living images*: see notes to 8, 13, and 30, 20.
- 31, 12. *especially that of Livy*: Shelley had originally written in his first draft of the *Defence* (Bod. MS. Shelley d. 1, f. 69 v.), 'Thus Livy is essentially a poet,' and had added as instances 'the defeat of Asdrubal, the orgies of the Roman Bacchants, the description of the vale of Tempe.'
- 31, 18. *Poetry is ever accompanied with pleasure*: these sentences recall a famous passage in Sidney: 'Nowe therein of all Sciences . . . is our Poet the Monarch . . . He beginneth not with obscure definitions, which must blur the margent with interpretations, and load the memory with doubtfulness: but hee commeth to you with words set in delightfull proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for the well inchaunting skill of Musicke; and with a tale forsooth he commeth unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner; and, pretending no more, doth intende the winning of the mind from wickednesse to vertue.'—*Apologie*, p. 25.
- 31, 36-32, 3. *The poems of Homer and his contemporaries . . . reposed*: Sidney had written at the beginning of his treatise, 'Let learned Greece, in any of her manifold Sciences, be able to shew me one booke before *Musaeus*, *Homer*, and *Hesiodus*: all three nothing els but Poets.'—*Apologie*, p. 3.
- 32, 6. *an ambition of becoming like to Achilles*: this argument is developed from Sidney: 'So it is in men (most of which are childish in the best things, till they bee cradled in their graves,) glad they will be to heare the tales of *Hercules*, *Achilles*, *Cyrus*, and *Aeneas*: and hearing them, must needs heare the right description of wisdom, valure, and iustice; which, if they had

been barely, that is to say, Philosophically set out, they would sweare they bee brought to schoole againe . . . Truly I have known men, that even with reading *Amadis de Gaule*, (which God knoweth wanteth much of a perfect Poesie) have found their harts mooved to the exercise of courtesie, liberalitie, and especially courage. Who readeth *Aeneas* carrying olde *Anchises* on his back, that wisheth not it were his fortune to perfourme so excellent an acte?—*Apologie*, pp. 25–6; from which indeed it would be possible to quote a good deal more to the same purpose. And earlier, ‘See whether wisdome and temperance in *Ulysses* and *Diomedes*, valure in *Achilles*, friendship in *Nisus* and *Eurialus*, even to an ignoraunt man, carry not an apparent shyning.’—*Ibid.* p. 18.

- 33, 2. *this planetary music* : ‘But if (fie of such a but) you be borne so neere the dull making *Cataract* of *Nilus*, that you cannot heare the Plannet-like Musick of Poetrie ;’—*Sidney, Apologie*, p. 63.
- 33, 3. *The whole objection, however, of the immorality of poetry* : an objection to which *Sidney* had been forced to reply by the attacks of *Gosson*, who had called the sayings of poets ‘the Cuppes of *Circes*, that turne reasonable Creatures into brute Beastes,’ and much else to the same effect.
- 34, 12. *a moral aim* : cf. note to 10, 20.
- 34, 33. *divinity in man* : in *Shelley’s* original draft (Bod. MS. *Shelley* d. 1, f. 63) this was followed by the sentence : ‘It is as if the continent of *Paradise* were overwhelmed and some shattered crag remained covered with asphodel [and] amaranth ; which bear a golden flower.’
- 35, 13–16. *it is indisputable . . . as at Athens* : This opinion was emphasized by *Shelley* in his unfinished *Discourse on the Manners of the Ancients*. ‘How superior was the spirit and system of their poetry to that of any other period ! So that, had any other genius equal in other respects to the greatest that ever enlightened the world, arisen in that age, he would have been superior to all, from this circumstance alone—that his conceptions would have assumed a more harmonious and perfect form. For it is worthy of observation, that whatever the poets of that age produced is as harmonious and perfect as possible. If a drama, for instance, were the composition of a person of inferior talent, it was still homogeneous and free from inequalities ; it was a whole, consistent with itself. The compositions of great minds bore throughout the sustained stamp of their greatness. In the poetry of succeeding ages the expectations are often exalted on *Icarean* wings, and fall, too much disappointed to give a

memory and a name to the oblivious pool in which they fell.' *Essays*, etc., 1840, i. 61.

- 36, 14. *Calderon, in his religious Autos*: eighteen months earlier, on September 21, 1819, Shelley had written to Peacock: 'Charles Clairmont is now with us on his way to Vienna. He has spent a year or more in Spain, where he has learnt Spanish, and I make him read Spanish all day long. It is a most powerful and expressive language, and I have already learnt sufficient to read with great ease their poet Calderon. I have read about twelve of his plays. Some of them certainly deserve to be ranked among the grandest and most perfect productions of the human mind. He exceeds all modern dramatists, with the exception of Shakespeare, whom he resembles, however, in the depth of thought and subtlety of imagination of his writings, and in the rare power of interweaving delicate and powerful comic traits with the most tragical situations, without diminishing their interest. I rate him far above Beaumont and Fletcher.' By November he had finished them, and he wrote to John Gisborne in that month: 'I am bathing myself in the light and odour of the flowery and starry "Autos". I have read them all more than once.'

- 36, 24. *But I digress.—The connexion*: Mrs. Shelley's fair copy of the *Defence* (Bod. MS. Shelley e. 6, page 12) gives this passage as Shelley wrote it, before John Hunt's excisions. It runs thus: 'But we digress.—The Author of the Four Ages of Poetry has prudently omitted to dispute on the effect of the Drama upon life and manners. For, if I know the knight by the devise of his shield, I have only to inscribe Philoctetes, or Agamemnon or Othello upon mine to put to flight the giant sophisms which have enchanted him, as the mirror of intolerable light, though on the arm of one of the weakest of the Paladins, could blind and scatter whole armies of necromancers and pagans. The connexion\*.'

The original form of this passage is also found in the holograph fragment in the possession of Sir John C. E. Shelley, printed by Mr. Ingpen, who by an evident error prints 'enchanted them.'

- 37, 10. *an exalted calm*: Shelley has clearly in mind Aristotle's definition of tragedy as 'through pity and fear effecting the purgation of these emotions,' and also probably the closing lines of Milton's *Samson Agonistes*:

"His servants he with new acquist  
Of true experience from this great event  
With peace and consolation hath dismiss'd,  
And calm of mind all passion spent.'

- 37, 22. *a prismatic and many-sided mirror*: so Hamlet in his famous speech on 'the purpose of Playing, whose end both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the Mirrour up to Nature.'—III. ii. 23.
- 38, 1. *are*: logic requires 'is.' Possibly in some early draft there was a plural subject; cp. note on 41, 21.
- 38, 14. *Milton stood alone*: 'Milton stands alone in the age which he illumined.'—Preface to *The Revolt of Islam*, 1818.
- 38, 18. *Comedy loses its ideal universality*: see introduction, p. xvi.
- 39, 12. *The bucolic writers*: Theocritus, Bion and Moschus.
- 40, 9. *the end of social corruption is to destroy all sensibility to pleasure*: cp. the three stanzas beginning 'On that hard Pagan world disgust And secret loathing fell,' in Matthew Arnold's *Obermann once more*.
- 40, 17. *Astræa*: the goddess of justice. Probably Shelley remembered either Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, i. 150-1, 'Piety lies vanquished, and last of the race of heaven the virgin Astræa has abandoned an earth drenched in slaughter,' or the Sixth Satire of Juvenal, 19-20, 'Then by degrees Astræa retired to the realms above, with Chastity for her companion, and the two sisters fled together.'
- 40, 27. *The sacred links of that chain . . . the life of all*: for this passage Shelley is indebted to Plato's account of Socrates' replies to the rhapsodist Ion, who had enquired why he was able to illustrate Homer, as all who had heard him would confess, with the utmost copiousness and beauty, but possessed no such power to illustrate other poets. The passages chiefly concerned run as follows in Shelley's translation of the *Ion*: "I will tell you, O Ion, what appears to me to be the cause of this inequality of power. It is that you are not master of any art for the illustration of Homer, but it is a divine influence which moves you, like that which resides in the stone called magnet by Euripides, and Heraclea by the people. For not only does this stone possess the power of attracting iron rings, but it can communicate to them the power of attracting other rings; so that you may see sometimes a long chain of rings, and other iron substances, attached and suspended one to the other by this influence. And as the power of the stone circulates through all the links of this series, and attaches each to each, so the Muse, communicating through those whom she has first inspired, to all others capable of sharing in the inspiration, and the influence of that first enthusiasm, creates a chain and a succession.' Later Ion speaks of his audience 'weeping, with eyes fixed earnestly on me, and overcome by my declamation.'



Socrates replies: 'Do you not perceive that your auditor is the last link of that chain which I have described as held together through the power of the magnet? You rhapsodists and actors are the middle links, of which the poet is the first—and through all these the God influences whichever mind he selects, as they conduct this power one to the other; and thus, as rings from the stone, so hangs a long series of chorus-dancers, teachers, and disciples from the Muse. Some poets are influenced by one Muse, some by another; we call them possessed, and this word really expresses the truth, for they are held. Others, who are interpreters, are inspired by the first links, the poets, and are filled with enthusiasm, some by one, some by another; some by Orpheus, some by Musæus, but the greater number are possessed and inspired by Homer.'—*Essays*, etc., 1840, i. 281–2, 286.

- 41, 21. *are as a mist of light which conceal*: the plural forms are explained by the original reading of Shelley's draft (Bod. MS. Shelley d. 1, f. 59): 'The beauty & the chosen delicacy of the expressions of the latter conceal', etc. Shelley drew his pen through the words, 'beauty & the,' after adding 'are as a mist of light' above the words 'latter conceal'.

- 41, 23. *Livy is instinct with poetry*: see note to 31, 12.

- 41, 28. *the substance*: Shelley's original draft (Bod. MS. Shelley d. 1, f. 59) continues as follows: 'Yet Poetry lived & lived in its intensest splendour in Rome, contemporaneously with all the other arts which add beauty & dignity to the condition of man; except in the instance of Rome that of civil institution. But the beauty & the excellence of that system of civil society which terminated in the overthrow of the liberties of the world & of its own: and which is even now the basis of those systems of tyranny to which its barbarian destroyers have conformed, can scarcely be educed in competition with Poetry source of whatever beauty or excellence of which any form or institution or opinion is susceptible. But I blaspheme.'

- 41, 30. *The true poetry of Rome lived in its institutions*: I think that Shelley must have been influenced here, consciously or otherwise, by those great lines of Virgil, not adequately to be translated, upon the destinies of Rome in *Aeneid*, vi. 847–53.

'Excudent alii spirantia mollius aera,  
Credo equidem, vivos ducent de marmore vultus,  
Orabunt causas melius, caelique meatus  
Describent radio, et surgentia sidera dicent:  
Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento;  
Hae tibi erunt artes, pacisque imponere morem,  
Parcere subiectis, et debellare superbos.'



They have been rendered thus by William Morris :

‘Others, I know, more tenderly may beat the breathing brass,  
And better from the marble block bring living looks to pass ;  
Others may better plead the cause, may compass heaven’s face,  
And mark it out, and tell the stars, their rising and their place :  
But thou, O Roman, look to it the folks of earth to sway ;  
For this shall be thine handicraft, peace on the world to lay,  
To spare the weak, to wear the proud by constant weight of war.’

42, 9. *quia carent vate sacro* : The quotation is from Horace’s Odes, IV. ix. 25–8.

‘Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona  
multi ; sed omnes illacrimabiles  
urgentur ignotique longa  
nocte, carent quia vate sacro.’

‘There lived brave men in plenty before Agamemnon, but they are all, unwept and forgotten, overwhelmed by eternal night for lack of a divine bard.’

42, 11. *an inspired rhapsodist* : Plato’s Ion is still in his mind ; see note to 40, 27.

42, 34. *the three forms into which Plato had distributed the faculties of mind* : probably in the *Timæus*, where Plato recognises a ruling immortal soul, seated in the brain ; a higher mortal soul, seated in the heart ; and a lower appetitive soul, also ruled by the immortal but directly commanded by the higher mortal soul.

43, 2. *Light seems to thicken* : this is a reference to Peacock’s claim that when the light of the Gospel began to spread over Europe, ‘by a mysterious and inscrutable dispensation, the darkness thickened with the progress of the light.’ See 11, 14–17. Shelley definitely denies Peacock’s implication later, at 43, 19–20 : ‘It is an error to impute the ignorance of the dark ages to the Christian doctrines.’

43, 3. *The crow . . . do rouse* : *Macbeth*, III. ii. 50.

43, 21. *Celtic nations* : he means ‘Teutonic,’ here and at 44, 20.

44, 5. *The principle of equality* : I think Shelley has in mind a passage in the second book of the *Republic*, beginning at § 369, where Socrates describes a State as arising ‘out of the needs of mankind ; no one is self-sufficing, but all of us have many wants. Can any other origin of a State be imagined ? . . . Then, as we have many wants, and many persons are needed to supply them, one takes a helper for one purpose and another for another ; and when these partners and helpers are gathered together in

one habitation the body of inhabitants is termed a State. . . . And they exchange with one another, and one gives, and another receives, under the idea that the exchange will be for their good.'—Jowett's translation, ed. 1908.

44, 20. *the Celtic nations*: he means 'Teutonic,' here and at 43, 21.

45, 7. *Galeotto . . . scrisse*: 'a Gallehaut was the book, and he who wrote it.'—Dante, *Inferno*, v. 137. Sir Gallehaut was the Pandarus of the Lancelot story. The line occurs where Francesca tells Dante of the love which she and Paolo had for each other. To make the meaning of Shelley's allusion clear, it will be best to quote Mr. W. W. Vernon's translation of the passage: 'We were one day reading for pastime of Lancelot, how love enchained him: Alone were we, and without any fear of being surprised. Many a time that reading caused our eyes to meet, and our faces to change colour: but one passage alone was it that overcame us. When we read how the smiling and longed-for lips (of Queen Guinevere) were kissed by so noble a lover, this one who never more shall be parted from me, all trembling kissed me on the mouth. Both the book and he who wrote it were a Gallehaut (*i.e.* a go-between) to us.'

Mr. Vernon adds a footnote: '*Galeotto fu il libro*, etc.: the meaning of this sentence is that the book of the Romance of Lancelot du Lac was to Francesca and Paolo the go-between that facilitated their realising their love for each other, just as in the Romance itself, Gallehaut was the intermediary between Lancelot and Queen Guinevere.'

45, 31. *Love, which found a worthy poet in Plato alone of all the ancients*: here, and in the remarks on the connection of love and poetry in this paragraph, Shelley has in mind the great speech of Agathon in Plato's *Symposium*. This speech occupies over six pages of Shelley's translation, but a few striking sentences may be quoted in illustration of this passage, and of the earlier one beginning 'The great secret of morals is love,' at 33, 20.

Agathon calls Love 'the youngest and the most delicate of all divinities . . . And first . . . the God is a wise poet; so wise that he can even make a poet one who was not before: for every one, even if before he were ever so undisciplined, becomes a poet as soon as he is touched by Love . . . And who will deny that the divine poetry, by which all living things are produced upon the earth, is not harmonized by the wisdom of Love? . . . But so soon as this deity sprang forth from the desire which forever tends in the universe towards that which

is lovely, then all blessings descended upon all living things, human and divine. Love seems to me, O Phædrus, a divinity the most beautiful and the best of all, and the author to all others of the excellencies with which his own nature is endowed. Nor can I restrain the poetic enthusiasm which takes possession of my discourse, and bids me declare that Love is the divinity who creates peace among men, and calm upon the sea, the windless silence of storms, repose and sleep in sadness. Love divests us of all alienation from each other, and fills our vacant hearts with overflowing sympathy; he gathers us together in such social meetings as we now delight to celebrate, our guardian and our guide in dances, and sacrifices, and feasts. Yes, Love, who showers benignity upon the world, and before whose presence all harsh passions flee and perish; the author of all soft affections; the destroyer of all ungente thoughts; merciful, mild; the object of the admiration of the wise, and the delight of gods; possessed by the fortunate, and desired by the unhappy, therefore unhappy because they possess him not; the father of grace, and delicacy, and gentleness, and delight, and persuasion, and desire; the cherisher of all that is good, the abolisher of all evil; our most excellent pilot, defence, saviour and guardian in labour and in fear, in desire and in reason; the ornament and governor of all things human and divine; the best, the loveliest; in whose footsteps every one ought to follow, celebrating him excellently in song, and bearing each his part in that divinest harmony which Love sings to all things which live and are, soothing the troubled minds of Gods and men.'—*Essays, etc.*, 1840, vol. i. pp. 115–19.

- 46, 22. *Riphæus, whom Virgil calls iustissimus unus*: in *Aeneid*, ii. 426–8:

‘cadit et Rhipeus, iustissimus unus  
Qui fuit in Teucris et servantissimus aequi.’

William Morris translates:

‘fell Rhipeus there, the heedfullest of right  
Of all among the Teucrian folk, the justest man of men.’

It is in the twentieth canto of the *Paradiso* that Dante places the soul of Rhipeus in the Christian heaven, disregarding any mere chronological objection that he could have had no mortal means of believing in Christ.

- 47, 11. *no superiority of moral virtue*: see Introduction, p. xxiii. Forman quotes from a book which (as he says) it is extremely unlikely that Shelley ever saw—William Blake’s *The Marriage*

of *Heaven and Hell*—a lengthy passage of criticism on Milton. The most striking parallel it affords is Blake's note that 'The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it.'

Shelley had already discussed Milton's Satan in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, published in the summer of 1820. Here he claims that 'the only imaginary being resembling in any degree Prometheus, is Satan; and Prometheus is, in my judgement, a more poetical character than Satan, because, in addition to courage, and majesty, and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force, he is susceptible of being described as exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandisement, which, in the Hero of *Paradise Lost*, interfere with the interest. The character of Satan engenders in the mind a pernicious casuistry which leads us to weigh his faults with his wrongs, and to excuse the former because the latter exceed all measure. In the minds of those who consider that magnificent fiction with a religious feeling it engenders something worse.' Later in the same preface he urges that 'the sacred Milton was, let it ever be remembered, a republican, and a bold enquirer into morals and religion.'

The claim that Milton alleges 'no superiority in moral virtue to his God over his Devil' is also put forward at some length, and often in the very phrases used in the *Defence*, in Shelley's essay *On the Devil, and Devils*: see Forman's edition of his *Prose Works*, 1880, vol. ii. pp. 388-90.

48, 27. *instinct with spirit*: see Introduction, p. xxiv.

49, 4-8. *The age . . . Italian invention*: Sidney had written of the 'Fathers in learning' of different countries, 'so in the Italian language, the first that made it aspire to be a Treasure-house of Science were the Poets *Dante, Boccace, and Petrarch*; so in our English were *Gower and Chawcer*.'—*Apologie*, p. 3.

49, 13. *times*: Mrs. Shelley's fair copy of the *Defence* (Bod. MS. Shelley c. 6, page 23), gives the original reading: 'times, and to revert to the partial instances cited as illustrations of an opinion the reverse of that attempted to be established in the Four Ages of Poetry.' A full stop is added after 'times' in the same ink—much blacker than that of the original script—in which the words 'and . . . Poetry' are struck out.

49, 14. *But poets have been challenged*: this begins a definite reply to the four paragraphs with which Peacock's essay concludes.

49, 22. *There are two kinds* : the holograph fragment of the *Defence* used by Forman (see Bibliographical Note, p. xxix) corresponds to the passage of the finished work beginning with these words and ending at 51, 5. Forman observed that 'The variations are so considerable that it is best to give the whole fragment just as it stands'. As printed by him, it runs as follows :

' In one sense Utility expresses the means for producing and fixing the most intense and durable and universal pleasure, and has relation to our intellectual being ; in another it expresses the means of banishing the importunity of the wants of our animal nature ; and surrounding us with security and tranquillity of life, destroying the grosser desires, superstition, &c., and conciliating such a degree of mutual forbearance between men as may spring from motives consistent with their own present and manifest advantage.—The author of *The Four Ages of Poetry* employs it solely in the latter sense.

' Undoubtedly the promoters of Utility, in this limited sense, have their due praise ; they have their appointed office in society ; they follow the footsteps of poets and copy their creations into the book of familiar life, and their exertions are of the highest value so long as they confine their administration of the concerns of the inferior powers of our nature within the limits of what is consistent with what is due to the superior ones. But whilst the sceptic destroys gross superstitions, let him not as some French writers have done, destroy the eternal truths written upon the minds and imaginations of men. Whilst the mechanist abridges, and the political economist combines labour, let them beware that the consequences of their speculations do not tend, as they have in modern England, to exasperate at once the extremes of luxury and want. But without an intermixture of the poetical element, such are the effects which must ever flow from the unmitigated exercise of the reason. The rich become richer, and the poor become poorer ; and tyranny and anarchy alternately furious.

' It is difficult to define pleasure in the highest sense, without combining a number of words which produce apparent paradoxes on account of the incommunicability of popular and philosophical from an inexplicable want of harmony in the constitution of our mortal being. The pain of the inferior is frequently synonymous with the pleasure of the superior portions of our nature, and terror, anguish, sorrow, despair itself, are often the selectest expressions of our approximation to this good. On this depends our pleasure with tragic fiction. Our pleasure in tragic fiction depends on this principle ; and



tragedy produces pleasure by affording a shadow of the pleasure which exists in intense . . . . This is the source also of the melancholy which is inseparable from the sweetest melody. The pleasure in sorrow is far intenser than that of pleasure itself, and it is sweeter to enter into the house of mourning than into the house of mirth. The pleasure of comedy is to that of tragedy as the pleasure of the senses to that of the imagination.'

Forman does not say whether the two blanks which he leaves represent lacunæ in the MS., or words which he was unable to read. The latter alternative seems more probable, but in any case it is evident from the repetition of the remark about pleasure in tragic fiction, from the clumsiness of the sentence about the inferior powers of our nature, and from the number of differences from the finished copy, that this fragment was an early and very rough draft.

- 49, 28. *But the narrower . . . animal nature* : Mrs. Shelley's fair copy of the *Defence* (Bod. MS. Shelley e. 6, p. 23) preserves the original form of this passage uncanceled : ' But the meaning in which the author of the Four Ages of Poetry seems to have employed the word utility is the narrower one of banishing the importunity of the wants of our animal nature.'
- 50, 16. *To him that hath* : a rough version of Mark iv. 25. Shelley's biblical quotations are seldom exact ; that at the foot of this page is evidently a memory of Ecclesiastes vii. 2, but the alliterative ' mirth ' pleased him better than ' feasting.'
- 51, 18. *the abolition of the Inquisition in Spain* : in the previous year, 1820.
- 51, 34. Shelley's first draft of the *Defence* (Bod. MS. Shelley d. 1, f. 46) shows that he originally intended another reference to Peacock at this point. ' The author of the four ages of Poetry closes his paper with an exhibition in array of all the denominations of the subordinate arts of life which are employed upon working out of the elements originally furnished by the poetical faculty materials of knowledge & power: and he protests against an attempt to create new elements by that only process, exhorting us at the same time to cultivate in preference.' This unfinished paragraph is much corrected, and its last eight words are struck out.
- 51, footnote. Mrs. Shelley's fair copy of the *Defence* (Bod. MS. Shelley e. 6, p. 25) shows the original form of the first part of this note to have been ' I follow the classification adopted by the author of the Four Ages of Poetry. But Rousseau was essentially a poet.' The words preceding ' was ' are heavily



struck out, and those subsequently printed are added above the line, in ink much blacker than that of the original script.

- 52, 11. 'I dare not . . . adage : *Macbeth* I. vii. 44. A favourite quotation with Shelley, already used (as Forman noted) both in *Zastrozzi* and in the *Proposals for an Association*.
- 53, 26-9. *Poetry is . . . say it* : Sidney had said much the same 'For Poesie, must not be drawne by the eares, it must bee gently led, or, rather, it must lead. Which was partly the cause, that made the auncient-learned affirme, it was a divine gift, and no humaine skill : sith all other knowledges lie ready for any that hath strength of witte ; a Poet no industrie can make, if his owne *Genius* bee not carried unto it ; and therefore is it an old Proverbe, *Orator fit, Poeta nascitur*.'—*Apologie*, p. 50. See also the passage from Plato's *Phaedrus*—a book well known to both Sidney and Shelley—quoted in the note to 56, 20.
- 54, 16-17. *the muse having 'dictated' to him the 'unpremeditated song'* : Milton's words were :

'my Celestial Patroness, who deignes  
Her nightly visitation unimplor'd,  
And dictates to me slumbring, or inspires  
Easie my unpremeditated Verse :  
Since first this Subject for Heroic Song  
Pleas'd me.'

*Paradise Lost*, ix. 21-6.

- 55, 1. *the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own* : the whole of this paragraph recalls the opinions on poetic inspiration which Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates in the *Ion*. Shelley was reading this book when *The Four Ages of Poetry* reached him, and in his letter of acknowledgement he urges Peacock to reconsider the *Ion* (see Introduction, p. xiii). The sentences on inspiration are a continuation of the first passage quoted in the note to 40, 27, and run as follows :
- 'For the authors of those great poems which we admire, do not attain to excellence through the rules of any art, but they utter their beautiful melodies of verse in a state of inspiration, and, as it were, *possessed* by a spirit not their own. Thus the composers of lyrical poetry create those admired songs of theirs in a state of divine insanity, like the Corybantes, who lose all control over their reason in the enthusiasm of the sacred dance ; and, during this supernatural possession, are excited to the rhythm and harmony which they communicate to men. Like the Bacchantes, who, when possessed by the God, draw honey and milk from the rivers, in which, when they come to their

senses, they find nothing but simple water. For the souls of the poets, as poets tell us, have this peculiar ministration in the world. They tell us that these souls, flying like bees from flower to flower, and wandering over the gardens and the meadows, and the honey-flowing fountains of the Muses, return to us laden with the sweetness of melody; and arrayed as they are in the plumes of rapid imagination, they speak truth. For a Poet is indeed a thing ethentially light, winged, and sacred, nor can he compose any thing worth calling poetry until he becomes inspired, and, as it were, mad, or whilst any reason remains in him. For whilst a man retains any portion of the thing called reason, he is utterly incompetent to produce poetry or to vaticinate. Thus, those who declaim various and beautiful poetry upon any subject, as for instance upon Homer, are not enabled to do so by art or study; but every rhapsodist or poet, whether dithyrambic, encomiastic, choral, epic, or iambic, is excellent in proportion to the extent of his participation in the divine influence, and the degree in which the Muse itself has descended on him. In other respects, poets may be sufficiently ignorant and incapable. For they do not compose according to any art which they have acquired, but from the impulse of the divinity within them; for did they know any rules of criticism according to which they could compose beautiful verses upon one subject, they would be able to exert the same faculty with respect to all or any other. The God seems purposely to have deprived all poets, prophets, and sooth-sayers of every particle of reason and understanding, the better to adapt them to their employment as his ministers and interpreters; and that we, their auditors, may acknowledge that those who write so beautifully, are possessed, and address us, inspired by the God.'

It is significant that fragments both of this passage, and of that quoted in a note to 40, 27, are found as jottings in the notebook (Bodleian Shelley MS. d. 1) containing Shelley's rough draft of the *Defence of Poetry*. M. Koszul printed these fragments at the close of his edition, but omitted to mention their Platonic origin.

Plato's theory of poetic inspiration is also advanced in the passage from the *Phaedrus* quoted in a note to 56, 20.

56, 5-6. '*The mind . . . heaven*': *Paradise Lost*, i. 254-5.

56, 11-12. *It makes us . . . chaos*: this sentence, like the three which follow it, is indebted to Sidney. 'Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapistry, as divers Poets have done, neither with so plesant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet smelling flowers,

nor whatsoever els may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brasen, the Poets only deliver a golden.'—*Apologie*, p. 8.

56, 20-1. *Non merita . . . il Poeta*: this opinion, that only the Deity and the Poet deserve the name of creator, had already been quoted in a letter to Peacock of August 16, 1818. 'What a wonderful passage there is in *Phaedrus*—the beginning, I think, of one of the speeches of Socrates—in praise of poetic madness, and in definition of what poetry is, and how a man becomes a poet. Every man who lives in this age and desires to write poetry, ought, as a preservative against the false and narrow systems of criticism which every poetical empiric vents, to impress himself with this sentence, if he would be numbered among those to whom may apply this proud, though sublime, expression of Tasso: *Non c'è in mondo chi merita nome di creatore, che Dio ed il Poeta.*' Peacock explains the allusion to *Phaedrus* by quoting Socrates' words on divine madness: 'that which proceeds from the Muses, taking possession of a tender and unoccupied soul, awakening, and bacchically inspiring it towards songs and other poetry, adorning myriads of ancient deeds, instructs succeeding generations; but he who, without this madness from the Muses, approaches the poetical gates, having persuaded himself that by art alone he may become sufficiently a poet, will find in the end his own imperfection, and see the poetry of his cold prudence vanish into nothingness before the light of that which has sprung from divine insanity. —*Platonis Phaedrus*, p. 245a.'—Peacock's *Memoirs of Shelley*, 1909, pp. 134-5.

57, 4-5. 'there sitting where we dare not soar': *Paradise Lost*, iv. 829.

57, 13-14. 'were as scarlet . . . snow': *Isaiah*, i. 18.

58, 14. *instead of*: Mrs. Shelley's fair copy of the *Defence* (Bod. MS. Shelley e. 6, p. 30) gives the original reading: 'instead of following that of the treatise which excited me to make them public. Thus although devoid of the formality of a polemical reply, if the view which they contain be just, they will be found to involve a refutation of the "Four Ages of Poetry" so far at least as regards the first division of the subject. I can readily conjecture what should have moved the gall of the learned and intelligent author of that paper—I confess myself like him unwilling to be stunned by the *Theseids* of the hoarse Codri of the day.' This passage has been altered in blacker ink (presumably by John Hunt) into the form in which it appears in the first edition.

- 58, 21-3. *the Theseids of the hoarse Codri of the day*. Bavius and Mævius : see the letter to Peacock of March 21, 1821, part of which is quoted on p. xv. Codrus owes his infamy as a bad poet to Juvenal, *Satires*, i. 1-2 ; Bavius and Mævius to Virgil, *Eclogues*, iii. 90-1, and (Mævius only) Horace, *Epode* x.
- 58, 26-34. *The first part . . . The second part* : see Introduction, p. xiv.
- 59, 6. *low-thoughted envy* : this phrase shows how Shelley's vocabulary benefited from his great predecessors. It is reminiscent of the 'low-creeping objections' against Poesie of Sidney's *Apologie*, and the 'low-thoughted care' of Milton's *Comus*, l. 6.
- The closing sentences of the *Defence*, from 'In spite of the low-thoughted envy' to the end, occur also, with slight variations, near the end of the first chapter of Shelley's *Philosophical View of Reform*, from which they were probably extracted for their present purpose. The date of composition of the *Philosophical View* is not certainly known, but it appears to have been finished by May 26, 1820, when he writes to Leigh Hunt about its proposed publication. It was first printed by Mr. T. W. Rolleston in 1920.
- 63, 2. *a series of unedited letters* : see pp. xxiv and xxxii.
- 64, 6. ποιητης : see 23, 9 and note.
- 65, 28-9. *the Ideas of Plato* : the N.E.D. defines 'idea' (in Platonic philosophy) as 'a supposed eternally existing pattern or archetype of any class of things, of which the individual things in that class are imperfect copies, and from which they derive their existence.'
- 68, 17. *the appearance of another sort of poet* : in English literature the best example is the discarding of outworn poetic conventions by Wordsworth.
- 72, 21-2. '*E pur si muove*' : 'Nevertheless, it does move' ; the words which tradition attributes to Galileo as spoken immediately after he had been forced by the Inquisition to deny the motion of the earth, which he had discovered and knew to exist.
- 76, 12-15. *The very first letter . . . sympathy with the oppressed* : the first of the spurious letters purported to be addressed by Shelley from University College, Oxford, in February 1811, to the Editor of *The Statesman*, London, in favour of 'those writers who have suffered the penalties of the law for the freedom and the spirit with which they descanted on the morals of the age, and chastised the vices, or ridiculed the follies, of individuals in every rank of life.' The forger was evidently inspired by the genuine letter of March 2, 1811, to Leigh Hunt.
- 80, 19. *his worst mistake* : the desertion of Harriet Shelley.

- 80, 28. *the laudanum-bottle* : Peacock gives a vivid account of an interview with Shelley about the middle of the year 1814. 'Between his old feelings towards Harriet, *from whom he was not then separated*, and his new passion for Mary, he showed in his looks, in his gestures, in his speech, the state of a mind 'suffering, like a little kingdom, the nature of an insurrection.' His eyes were bloodshot, his hair and dress disordered. He caught up a bottle of laudanum, and said: "I never part from this."' —Peacock's *Memoirs of Shelley*, 1909, p. 48. Peacock adds in a note, 'I believe that up to this time he had never travelled without pistols for defence, nor without laudanum as a refuge from intolerable pain.' Shelley's letters to Miss Hitchener show that he had been dosing himself with it at Keswick in 1811-12.
- 80, 35-6. *The nocturnal attack in Wales . . . was assuredly a delusion* : the reference is to the successful attempt of a Welsh farmer to scare Shelley away from the neighbourhood of Tanyrallt by shots and an assault on the night of February 26, 1813. The cause was Shelley's propensity for humanely slaughtering sick sheep with a pistol during his rambles, a habit not properly appreciated by sheep-owners in the district. As Shelley took the farmer for the devil, and set fire to a wood in the hope of igniting him, there was some ground for the disinclination of Peacock and others to believe his highly-coloured account of the affair. It was long and generally regarded as little more than a hallucination, but the appearance in the *Century Magazine* for October 1905 of an article by Miss M. L. Crofts has thrown new light on the matter.





## APPENDIX

SHELLEY'S two unfinished drafts of his proposed letter to Ollier fill six pages of the notebook (Bodleian MS. Shelley d. 1) containing the holograph draft of the *Defence* which superseded them. In fact they occupy a little island in the body of this draft, soon after its beginning : no doubt, after deciding to give up the epistolary form, Shelley turned back a few pages to begin his *Defence*, and continued it, when he came to the pages already covered, so as to envelop them.

The first<sup>1</sup> draft begins on f. 81 rev., jumps thence to f. 79 rev., and continues on f. 78 v. rev. ; there are also some additional sentences, evidently intended to be worked into this draft, occupying f. 80 v. rev. and f. 80 rev. The second draft occupies f. 79 v. rev.

Both drafts are of the roughest type, and are full of cancellations. In some places, particularly at the beginning of the second draft, passages have been so freely struck out, altered, added to, and rejected yet again, that they are in inextricable confusion. In general, I have only included those words or passages through which Shelley drew his pen, if it seemed that some definite advantage would result, and such words or passages are distinguished by being enclosed in square brackets. These drafts have previously been printed only by M. Koszul, in his *Shelley's Prose in the Bodleian Manuscripts*, 1910 ; and with various

<sup>1</sup> First only in position in the MS., not necessarily in order of composition.

errors, of which the more serious are, in the first draft, 'two positions' for 'propositions,' '[lamentable?]' for 'for' 'favourable period for,' 'forms' for 'frame,' and the omission of 'of early ages of the world'; and in the second draft, 'scan' for 'scale,' and the omission of 'new' before 'construction.'

The importance of these drafts is shown on p. xvii of the Introduction.

## FIRST DRAFT

Mr Editor

The ingenious author of a paper which lately appeared in your Miscellany, entitled The four ages of Poetry, has directed the light of a mind replete with taste & learning to the illustration of [a paradox, so dark, as of itself to absorb whatever rays of truth might fall upon it.] I will endeavour to place the propositions which compose this opinion

There are four ages of Poetry, corresponding to the four ages of the world [; in which this art or faculty has progressively deteriorated] Poetry was [at first] no more than the rude efforts of expression of early ages of the world before language had assumed any degree of philosophical perfection, and instead of softening the manners & refining the feelings of the semibarbarians whose intervals of repose it soothed; it flattered their vices & hardened them to fresh acts of carnage & destruction. The character & personal conduct of the poets themselves (and this is the most favourable period for poetry) was then contemptible. 3<sup>dly</sup> With the progress of civil society & the developement of the arts of life poetry has deteriorated in exact proportion to the universal amelioration; & the examples [afforded by it] in ages of high [refinement & civilization], & especially in the age in which we live, are below derision, & the instruments of the utmost passiveness & depravity of moral sentiment. 4<sup>thly</sup> Every person conscious of in-

tellectual power ought studiously to wean himself from the study & the practise of poetry, & ought to apply that power to general finance, political economy, to the study in short [of] the laws according to which the frame of the social order might be more wisely regulated for the happiness of those whom it binds together. [These are indeed high objects, & I pledge myself to worship Themis rather than Apollo if I have attempted to, could it be proved that]—

Before we subject these propositions to [analysis examination], it were well to discover what poetry is

### ADDITIONAL SENTENCES

So dark a paradox may absorb the brightest rays of mind which fall upon it. [It is an impious daring attempt to extinguish Imagination, which is the Sun of life, Impious attempt, parricidal & self murdering attempt] & would leave to its opponent a secure but an inglorious conquest.

He would extinguish Imagination which is the Sun of life, & grope his way by the cold & uncertain & borrowed light of that Moon which he calls Reason,—stumbling over the interlunar chasm of time where she deserts us, and an owl, rather than an eagle, stare with dazzled eyes on the watery orb which is the Queen of his pale Heaven.—But let us in true sense place within the scale of reason an opinion so light, that there is less danger that it should preponderate, than that the winged words of which it is composed should fly out of the balance like those with which Spensers giant thought to counterpoise the golden weight of justice.

with which this writer attempts to prove that Poetry is a bad thing. [(I hope soon to see a Treatise against the light of the Sun adorn your columns.) He rides his hobby, like Obadiah did the coach horse through thick and thin, but] He rides his hobby of a paradox with a grace

## SECOND DRAFT

Mr Editor

The following remarks were suggested by an essay entitled the Four ages of Poetry which appeared some months since in your valuable Miscellany. [I was delighted by the wit the spirit, the learning of this essay ; but that a writer but the paradox it attempts to support I suspect it to be written by a friend of mine who is a desperate rider of a hobby It is impossible not to be delighted by The wit the learning & the spirit of this essay are the spurs of a hobby of a new construction :] but these qualities [in the present instance ought] deserve to be buried where four roads meet, with a stake through their body, for they are caught in the very fact of suicide. The writer, in this respect, like a pig swimming, he cuts his own throat.

## TEXTUAL EMENDATIONS

THE original text of 1840 has been followed in the present edition, except that the following ten misprints have been corrected. The sign > stands for 'has been emended to'; 'eds.' after a reading represents the editions of 1845-47-52, 'd. 1' Shelley's holograph draft in the Bodleian, and 'e. 6' Mary Shelley's transcript in the Bodleian.

29. 2, sort of > certain *eds.*, d. 1, e. 6: 29. 29, harmony > measure *eds.*, d. 1, e. 6: 38. 18, loves > loses *eds.*, e. 6: 43. 5 so roude > do rouse (*eds.*, d. 1 and e. 6 read do rouze, drouse in the previous line having been spelt drouze): 45. 8, crisse. > scrisse. *eds.*, e. 6: 45. 28, 'Divina Commedia,' > 'Divine Drama,' *eds.*, d. 1, e. 6: 46. 23, poetical > heretical *eds.*, e. 6: 48. 36, of all > all *eds.*, e. 6 (d. 1 reads all of): 55. 3, morning > coming *eds.*, d. 1, e. 6: 56. 35, confirm > confine *eds.*, e. 6.

All the above are obvious compositors' blunders ('harmony' at 29. 30 having been caught up from the following line), except 'Divina Commedia', which is probably an alteration by Mary Shelley of which she subsequently repented. The readings 'certain' and 'measure' are confirmed, if confirmation were needed, by the holograph fragment in Sir John C. E. Shelley's possession, and the reading 'confine' by Jane Clairmont's transcript quoted by Forman. Where d. 1 is not cited, it is because the passage is not contained in it.

Mary Shelley was evidently not aware that Calaber was merely an additional title bestowed on Quintus Smyrnaeus, and at p. 48, l. 4 she wrote, and printed, a comma after

Calaber, with disastrous results. It is not, of course, to be found in Shelley's MS. draft (d. 1), or in the present text. The 1840 printer's spelling of 'Boccacio' [*sic*] is neither Shelley's nor Mary's, and has been corrected. At p. 54, l. 28 I have, after some hesitation, allowed the reading of the printed texts, 'best and happiest moments,' to stand, although both Shelley's draft (d. 1) and Mary Shelley's transcript (e. 6) read 'happiest and best moments.' I have no doubt that the responsibility for the change is hers, though it may of course have been warranted by a lost holograph of Shelley's.





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